

UZBEKISTAN: ARE THERE PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE?



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Briefing of the
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

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Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
234 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-1901
csce@mail.house.gov
<http://www.csce.gov>

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The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 55 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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PARTICIPANTS

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Dorothy Douglas Taft, Deputy Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe | 1 |
| Abdurahim Polat, Chairman of the Birlik Party | 2 |
| Gulam Umarov, son of Sanjar Umarov, Imprisoned Chairman of the Sunshine Coalition | 6 |
| Muhammad Salih, Chairman of the Erk Party | 8 |
| Martha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace | 10 |

APPENDICES

| | |
|---|----|
| Prepared statement of Abdurahim Polat | 21 |
| Prepared statement of Martha Brill Olcott | 27 |

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The briefing was held at 4:07 p.m. in room 226 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, Dorothy Douglas Taft, Deputy Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, moderating.

Panalists present: Dorothy Douglas Taft, Deputy Chief of Staff, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Abdurahim Polat, Chairman of the Birlik Party; Gulam Umarov, son of Sanjar Umarov, imprisoned Chairman of the Sunshine Coalition; Muhammad Salih, Chairman of the ERK Party; and Dr. Martha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Ms. TAFT. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Dorothy Taft, and I serve as the Deputy Chief of Staff for the Helsinki Commission.

And on behalf of our Chairman, Senator Sam Brownback, and our Co-Chairman, Congressman Chris Smith, I want to welcome each one of you here today for this briefing regarding Uzbekistan entitled, "Are There Prospects for Change?"

And we appreciate each of you taking the time to be with us, and we especially appreciate our presenters today, who are here to help inform us of the situation.

Our purpose today is to examine whether, after almost 20 years of President Karimov's rule, there are any prospects for positive change in Uzbekistan. For many years, Uzbekistan has been a repressive, authoritarian state without legal opposition or any tolerance for dissenting viewpoints.

But since the events in Andijon in May of last year, the situation in that long-suffering country has deteriorated still further. The countrywide crackdown on human rights activists, religious groups, and members of opposition parties and movements has continued. Scores of them have been arrested.

And just in the last few days, we've learned of the disappearance of Talib Yakubov, the leader of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. Helsinki Commission staff, including myself, have known him and dealt with him for many years now, since 1991.

Mr. Yakubov has bravely persevered in his campaign to monitor rights violations, despite threats, harassment and continuous intimidation, not to mention the arrests and beatings of many of his colleagues, and even the deaths of some of them. We anxiously await word on his whereabouts and his well-being.

Given the situation in Uzbekistan, the timeliness of our briefing today is quite obvious. As it happens, among our speakers are individuals who know all too well the mechanics of Uzbek repression. In 1992, Dr. Abdurahim Polat, leader of Birlik, was almost killed on a Tashkent street by thugs. The same year, he had to flee his homeland, which he has not seen since.

Muhammad Salih, the leader of ERK, was also forced into exile, where he has remained ever since. His brothers, however, were arrested and suffered in Uzbek jails, where two of them remain.

Gulam Umarov's father, Sanjay Umarov, the leader of the Sunshine Coalition, is also today in prison. When I was in Tashkent in February, I did observe part of his court proceedings.

Clearly, attempting to engage in opposition activity in Uzbekistan is very dangerous. The personal experiences of these three panelists lend their testimony a special weight and poignancy.

To round out viewpoints, we have also invited Dr. Martha Olcott, a preeminent analyst on Central Asia. Thankfully, she has managed to study the region for the last quarter-century in relative safety, though not without many adventures. I am sure she will give our discussion a big-picture perspective and the benefit of comparative analysis.

The Congress, for its part, is working to craft a U.S. response to the Andijon killings and the increased repression by the Uzbek Government. In May, Chairman Brownback introduced the Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006, which lays out guidelines for how U.S. policy toward Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries and the Caucasus should be crafted in the area of economics, security and democratization.

Also, Co-Chairman Smith has introduced the Central Asia Democracy and Human Rights Promotion Act, H.R. 5382. In addition to providing funding for increased human rights work in the region, this legislation would place sanctions on Uzbekistan by creating a visa ban, an arms ban, and an asset freeze on President Karimov, other regime leaders and their families. It has been marked up in Mr. Smith's subcommittee of the International Relations Committee in the House, just before the July 4th recess, and we await its further consideration by the House.

Again, I want to welcome each of you here. At the end of the presentations, we will have a time of questions that can be presented from the floor to our esteemed panel today.

I will ask Mr. Abdurahim Polat to begin.

Mr. POLAT. Thank you.

[Off-mike] read my text. In my written text, Mr. Chairman—he's not here, but I will say Mr. Chairman—distinguished members of the Commission who are not there, I'm grateful for this opportunity to make this speech here at the U.S. Congress and participate in discussion of issues regarding Uzbekistan.

Of course, I will discuss it as a politician, but now I'm not a politician. Right now, I'm a person who's desperately thinking how I have to squeeze my 15-page speech to 2 pages, in order to put myself within your time frame.

Ms. TAFT. We appreciate that.

Mr. POLAT. So that's why I will be very short.

So we're going to talk about democratic changes in Uzbekistan. It's my fourth speech here before the Helsinki Commission. Three times before, I was talking only about

Uzbekistan and why criticizing Uzbekistan, but now I will touch Uzbekistan minimally, especially power. I will criticize the West, the United States, and by tradition, ERK Party.

So I think, for changes in Uzbekistan to occur three factors are very important to my mind. But need the factors much more, but I am talking factors that we can influence, because factor of Karimov, it is for us beyond influence.

So what are the three factors: First, the help of USA and West to the Uzbek democrats. Of course, I cannot influence to United States on this, too, but I hope that together we can influence.

I am skeptical about the help of the United States and the West. There are lots of reasons. I think future political scientists will investigate it in full and make complete conclusions. But now I was going to give some examples, very frustrating for us, examples which are showing that the West and United States are not investigating these problems of Uzbek opposition.

That's why I will not, because of short time, I will not recount all of these examples. They are in my speech, in short speech, 5 pages, and full in 15 pages. So that's why I will go immediately to my conclusions.

Analyzing the existing facts, we come to a conclusion. And this conclusion we recently expressed in the direct statement regarding this first anniversary of Andijon events. I will bring one quotation to your attention.

It's very important to lend the support to further democratic forces inside the country. However, it's impossible to speak about any appreciable interest from the West in the problems of democrats in Uzbekistan.

One of the reasons, it's written in my statement, but I think it's the single main reasons. It's an excessive fear of the West from possible rising of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia if the existing regime weakens and democracy develops.

The West and United States ready to support Karimov's regime in order to prevent the weakening of the regime if democrats will come to the country. And in this case, Islam radicalism will just rise up, maybe uncontrollably or uncontrolled.

First conclusion about my first point, so we are not waiting now for any reasonable help from West or the United States. And, second, so what do we have to do? We have to do something, if we are doing and we will do.

First, I have to say, in 1992, 1993, in these years, Uzbek opposition was cracked down, but beginning in this century, we've begun to reverse. After September 11, 2001, it was one of the momentous events for the world, but it's a little bit useful for us, in the opposition, where was the birth and, in 2003, the Birlik Congress was held in Tashkent.

For democratic opposition, it's very important, if we are going forward by democratic ways, we have to participate in the elections. So we choose two of these directions for us as main directions of activity.

And I wrote here about two of our activities, about fighting for registration, fighting to participate in 2004 election, where in Uzbekistan parliamentary elections we tried to participate in. And I wrote about it and finished each part of my speech by this word. One has to understand that we did what's almost impossible in dictatorship Uzbekistan, but we did it.

It's very boring maybe for somebody—if who is interested, you can read my speech, because what we did for registration Birlik Party in order to participate in elections 2004,

it was impossible. All political parties said it as impossible. That's why they even don't try. But we try. We did something.

Only the Helsinki Commission tried to help us in the matter of the registration, but kind the help was? The letter of the Commission was sent to President Karimov. But in spite of my pleading requests, the letter was not only about Birlik. There were enumerated parties which didn't even apply for registration.

In other words, this letter sent Uzbek authorities the wrong signals. First, sender of letter doesn't even know the real situation. And, second, therefore the letter is not serious and of no insistence.

I will compare this to today's events, today's image. Now that United States will demand from Hezbollah to stop hitting by rocket not only Israel, but Israel and Australia. Can you image? Who will accept this kind of demand seriously? It will be signal for Hezbollah to continue to hit Israel.

So that's why that letter from Commission to Karimov was a signal to Karimov: Don't register. We will not insist.

I am sure, if that damage was in 2004, when relations between Uzbekistan and United States were good. I'm sure it will look—this kind of letter could promote the process of registration. Maybe it [inaudible]. And the same was in the process of participating of the 2004 elections.

The duty of this elections campaign, high-level commission delegation from [inaudible] Uzbekistan, it again begs them to meet our candidates in Uzbekistan. We know you know what Uzbekistan is. Karimov officially declared that Birlik is a terrorist organization. In spite of this, we could nominate 10 candidates from 10 districts of a total of 120 districts.

I think it was impossible. Many people said impossible. Other parties said this is impossible like we did it. But the delegation of Stoudmann was asking them to officially meet with our candidates, then met the election commission, and I'm sure that you can promote this process a little bit forward. Many of them will register. Even one for us, it is huge win. But they didn't meet.

So now Presidential elections are coming in 2007. And now don't [inaudible] it is bloody regime, it's a dictatorship country. In spite of this, we are going to participate. We are trying. We will try to participate in the elections.

Now, all opposition groups, opposition parties united in what questions. We have to go into the election with one candidate, because in our situation to go to elections with several candidates, it will be not [inaudible] but it's deadly for us, but only group. It's one small group, the ERK Party, leading by Muhammad Salih, is not ready to cooperate with us, but we will continue this job.

For if we will go to elections, it's more important to have our mass media, at least newspapers. Of course, we're not thinking about TV or radio. Even in Russia the opposition didn't have it—even newspapers or journals. We have one journal, Harakat. We are publishing it now for 10 years, with help from an organization from the United States. But circulation is only 3,000, nothing for Uzbekistan with a population of 26 million.

And we're seeking to raise the circulation a little bit to 10,000, 20,000. It's funny how much it will—I wouldn't even say about what kind of money we need for this, what kind of expenses are involved. But the U.S. organization didn't give us, and I think they will

not give us the money, in order to not irritate Karimov's administration, because if we reach 20,000, it will actually irritate Karimov's administration.

And so I thought about a second factor. Second factor is we are fighting. We will fighting in any days with support of United States, with support of the West, without them. But we need their support.

Third factor, very important for us, it is internal situation in the opposition. It has become some kind of fission, that Uzbek opposition is weak, Uzbek opposition is not united. Of course, Uzbek opposition is democratic organization. But Hizb'ut Tahrir, or Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. We cannot be united with them.

Fourth, we have to say about democratic opposition. Democratic Uzbek opposition is united. Yes, there are some groups inside democratic opposition, they claim they're opposition. They use some democratic phraseology, but they are not democratic.

Many people know that I several times quoted Mr. Muhammad Salih. He's leader of the one small group, ERK. It's actually small, maybe not more 50 peoples in Uzbekistan. And he was reading in newspaper, not someone on the street. He says: We have to rise our youth generation in that way, that way have to go to death without thinking, if order was given by the name of Allah.

It's not bin Laden. It's Muhammad Salih. Many people knew about this statement. And I'm agreeing now with the people, with these people who say me, "Oh, it was written a long time ago. We have to live with today's problems."

I'm agreeing with you, my goal, too. And we have to look not back, but forward. We have to live with today's problems. So in my hands, because it's written in my text, so I have to find what is in my hands. In my hands, the article is not written 10 years ago; this article written just 29 days ago.

It's June 26, 2006. Name the article we need. We need, we need second part of savior. We need savior. It's very boring article. I will not translate all of it. I will give you two quotations, very short, and I will finish.

"So the West is going to the end because it's drowning in the bog of social, moral illnesses. Their women, West's women, I mean, cannot give birth to more than two kids. It's not enough to maintain acts of humanity. China will drown by another reasons. Only Muslims will survive, because we are following Hadis of the Prophet Muhammad who say reproduce. That is why our women has at least four children."

"Only Islam conforms to democracy. Others not. Very soon, the West will understand it, that Islam conforms, only Islam. And we'll let Islam itself—the West will let Islam. If person, any person, not a Muslim, if person is perfect, there should be democracy in his head and Islam in the heart."

The article is very short, but even in this short article, given the date, time when it will be done. The West will let Islam, and world will be Islamic, 2050, not a long time. In that time, we have to have some leader. And leaders already among us, he says about humanity, that he already born, but I have to say you we are very hopeful people in this room, because he is here, this person among us in this room. He is Muhammad Salih, the leader of ERK Party.

I'm sure article is written by Muhammad Salih but signed not by Muhammad Salih—very important—by chairman of youth of ERK Party.

You remember my first quotation about what he say, Muhammad Salih, about youth? We have to raise our new population in this direction. They're already raised it.

So I want to say for people who are supposedly uncomfortable about this unity, I'm saying to you, democratic opposition of Uzbekistan is united. And it cannot get together with these fanatical and ignorance of this faction of ERK. We are different.

If somebody wants to read this article on the site of the Party ERK, you have to do it immediately. I think they already call and, after several minutes, it will be removed, of course, from the site.

So we Uzbek democrats need the support of the United States and the West, but as I repeated, there is not interest from that side—the West and the United States—in our problems. I hope I was heard today. Why? It's my last speech in the Helsinki Commission, because I think you will invite to be here bin Laden himself. Or maybe for the good composition, you can invite me, too. Thank you very much.

Ms. TAFT. The Helsinki Commission does have a very long and noble tradition of allowing and supporting free speech and the right of people of various political views to have a place to state their opinion, and I think that today's panel is shaping up to be just that kind of an opportunity.

And so we'll have our next presenter today, Mr. Umarov.

Mr. UMAROV. Well, thank you for the introduction.

My name is Gulam Umarov, and I'm the son of Sanjar Umarov, the chairman of Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank members of the U.S. Helsinki Commission for the opportunity to speak to you today on behalf of my father and the leadership of the Sunshine Coalition. My father himself would be here today to address the Commission if he was not currently in prison, Uzbek prison currently. As a result of his call for social and economic reforms in Uzbekistan, during the time given to me I'd like to provide the Commission with some background on why the Sunshine Coalition was founded, and how the coalition fits in the political landscape of Uzbekistan, and how the coalition members intend to continue my father's work, calling for dialogue and peaceful reforms in Uzbekistan.

The Sunshine Coalition was founded in April of last year by a new generation of businessmen, artists, and intellectuals who had come to prominence after the Republic of Uzbekistan declared its independence from the Soviet Union. These like-minded individuals became increasingly concerned about the multi-faceted economic, social and environmental crises facing Uzbekistan.

They envisioned Sunshine Uzbekistan, as a way to engage all Uzbekistan's stakeholders in a dialogue about how to bring peaceful reform to all of our country. The Coalition's leadership includes many highly educated individuals who have benefited from the best of Soviet and Western educational institutions.

Their professional experiences include leading the development of political organizations, economic development, and social reforms. The Sunshine Coalition has always worked for dialogue and reform within the framework of the constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and deplores any forceful attempts to gain power.

The Coalition shares many of the concerns of the veteran political movements, such as ERK and Birlik parties. ERK and Birlik have a long history and a deep understanding of social processes in our multi-national republic. With regard to freedom of speech, human rights, and other fundamental democratic principles, our voice is one with ERK and Birlik parties.

We stand together against any form of violence towards civil society. We are as one for reforms aimed at improving the life of Uzbekistan's citizens. And the Sunshine Coalition applauds their contribution in redefining our national identity.

But there are differences. If there were none, then we would all be one party. As mentioned earlier, ERK and Birlik are veteran opposition movements which were born during Soviet period of Gorbachev perestroika. Consequently, their views on the problems facing Uzbekistan today are rooted in that era.

However, the present crises facing Uzbekistan today are very different from those of Gorbachev era. Our Coalition was created as a contemporary response to crises facing Uzbekistan today. Our leadership and members understand that we cannot forget the lessons of the past, but also understand that we must live in the world of today so that we can build a better future for our children and grandchildren.

And the only practical to build a better future for our fellow citizens is engaging the current regime in a dialogue about reform of Uzbekistan.

The members of Sunshine Coalition have no illusion about how difficult it will be to engage the current regime in a dialogue. And by way of illustration, I would like now to say a few words about my father, Sanjar Umarov, the chairman of the Coalition.

Dr. Umarov was educated as a physicist and mathematician and left the academic world for the business world in the late '80s. For the first 14 years of Uzbekistan's independence, he participated in developing several major projects, in agriculture, telecommunications, and in the oil and gas sectors.

However, beginning in 2003, he saw that the private entrepreneurs were being increasingly stifled by the corrupt Uzbek bureaucracy. Therefore, he felt compelled to give up private business in order to help create a coalition of progressive thinkers that would work on developing and promoting economic and social reforms in Uzbekistan.

His work bore fruit in April 2005, with the founding of the Sunshine Coalition of Uzbekistan. Subsequent to its founding, Sanjar Umarov was elected as the chairman. A month after his election as the chairman, the Government of Uzbekistan undertook the coordinated and intensive campaign against him and all those associated with him.

As a result of this campaign, over 500 people lost their jobs. Hundreds of individuals were interrogated, and dozens of criminal cases were opened against anybody related one way or another with leadership of the Coalition and its supporters. Despite the great pressure, my father continued to express his views that the only solution to Uzbekistan's growing social and economic crises was the opening of a dialogue with the Government of Uzbekistan.

Sadly, on October 22, 2005, Sanjar Umarov was arrested and sentenced in record time to 10½ years of imprisonment, near the city of Bukhara. We still remain hopeful that the baseless charges against my father will ultimately be dismissed by the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan. Unlike most political trials in Uzbekistan, my father's case received wide international attention.

As an example of how the regime is abusing human rights and the rule of law, in response to my father's unfair treatment by the prosecutorial bureaucracy in early November 2005, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution expressing its concern about his detention and mistreatment. This resolution was sponsored by Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Richard Lugar, as well as the Senate Majority Leader, Bill Frist, and Senator John McCain.

In mid-December 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed a companion resolution, sponsored by Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Congressman Christopher Smith, and many others, also expressing concern about the treatment of Sanjar Umarov. The passage of these resolutions was significant, as both houses of Congress had not passed a common resolution concerning an individual human rights case since the Mandela freedom resolution in 1984.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our family's deep appreciation for the actions of the House and the Senate.

We also thank the U.N. Committee on Human Rights for their attention and many other human rights organizations that have spoken out on my father's behalf.

Despite Sanjar Umarov's continued imprisonment, the work of the Sunshine Coalition continues throughout programs like the International Economic Advisory Council. That Council is assisting the Coalition's leadership in defining a concrete set of reform proposals that can serve as a basis for beginning a dialogue with the current regime.

The Sunshine Coalition remains optimistic about the potential for reform in Uzbekistan but, at the same time, understands how difficult the road ahead may be. The only way forward for Uzbekistan is creating a meaningful dialogue with the current regime, throughout which the citizens of Uzbekistan can realize their hopes and dreams.

We ask our Uzbek brothers and sisters around the world to join our effort to change Uzbekistan toward peaceful and constructive dialogue.

Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you.

And our next presenter, Mr. Salih.

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. Thank you. We have always been in favor of a dialogue with the regime of President Islam Karimov, and we have always welcomed any attempts from the West to establish such a dialogue.

This is the case, not only because the West has made democratic reforms in Uzbekistan the main priority in that dialogue, but also because we see that cooperation with the West would create opportunities for the country's economic development and for strengthening our sovereignty. However, President Karimov has dealt a blow to the interests of the people of Uzbekistan and has turned away from the Western democracies and made it clear that democratic transformation is not acceptable for his regime.

But today, some advocates of the renewal of dialogue with Karimov's regime say that it is still necessary, arguing that the West will lose a great deal, both politically and economically, if it's tough on Karimov's government and isolates it internationally.

I would like to reassure them: The West has nothing significant to lose in Uzbekistan, as it never gained anything tangible in the political, economic or military fields. However, the West has now lost even those humble gains that were achieved over the course of 15 years of cooperation with Tashkent.

Let's take the political field. The democratic institutions that were created over the past 15 years of cooperation with the West were always dependent on the Uzbek president's whim. He could ban them, eliminate them at any moment—and this is what's happened when the West had called for an independent inquiry into the Andijon massacre.

Through 15 years of cooperation with the Uzbek regime, the West was never able to pressure it to legalize opposition parties and to hold fair elections with participation of

the opposition and independent candidates. Not a single political party in opposition to Karimov regime has been registered over that period. Two human rights organizations were granted registration, only to be banned soon thereafter.

Western countries and international organizations have made great efforts to support economic development, strengthen democratic institutions, and eliminate poverty. They brought in significant financial and human resources to achieve those goals and provided generous humanitarian aid. But all of these efforts were, in the end, brought to nothing because of one person: President Islam Karimov.

Despite its sincere efforts, the West has not seen improvements in the human rights record of Karimov's government. The West's efforts have included condemnation of torture and persecution based on political or religious beliefs. Of course, Western pressure regarding these problems worked as a restraining factor, but it was not sufficient enough to change President Karimov's internal policies.

The same is true with regards to military cooperation, the fight against terrorism, and drugs, and the illegal trade in weapons. The Khanabad airbase, though there was a lot of discussion surrounding it, failed to become a staging point for U.S. and NATO's long-term plans in Central Asia. It was limited to carrying out tactical tasks rather than strategic ones, and the saddest thing is that its fate also depended on the will and caprices of the same Uzbek ruler, President Islam Karimov.

The technical and military aid provided by the West to Karimov's regime to fight terrorism, drugs, and illegal arms trade was instead used by Karimov to suppress opposition and dissidents, and not only in Andijon.

Uzbekistan remains a major transit point for drugs from Afghanistan. This illicit trade is controlled by Uzbek criminal groups that closely cooperate with law enforcement and high-ranking government officials of Uzbekistan. Part of the money provided to fight terrorism was used to ensure personal security of the president and his family and inner circle.

The economic situation looks even worse. During his entire time in office, President Karimov failed to create conditions for foreign investment. Uzbekistan remains a high-risk zone for Western investment. Any business involving foreign partners, and is controlled personally by the president or by members of his family and inner circle.

For the handful of foreign companies that are still working in the country, there is no guarantee that their Uzbek partners will fulfill their obligations and will observe terms of the contracts that they had signed. The only Western companies that operate in the country are there because they have personal guarantees from President Karimov. All economic decisions depend, again, on the will of one person.

A recent example is the government's scrapping of tax breaks for more than 30 major joint ventures with foreign capital. Among them are the gold mining companies, such as Zerafshan Newmont based in Derelshan, Texaco, Nestle and many others. Tax breaks remain in place for the Russian companies only, such as Lukoil and Gazprom.

As you can see, the guarantees of the government and the president himself are not trustworthy. The same goes for his foreign policy priorities. Yesterday, his priority was the West; today, it is Russia. We cannot foresee what it will be tomorrow.

We can only guess that tomorrow Russian companies may face the same problems that the Western ones are facing today, and then one day no one will be surprised to see

that Karimov's best partner becomes North Korea and that the terrorists that he's fighting today ensure his personal security.

Karimov's unpredictable personality has an impact on the stability of the country. A leader with such traits cannot be a guarantor of security.

I would like to clarify that. Perhaps I was not quite right in saying that the West had nothing to lose in Uzbekistan. Indeed, the West did lose something: The West lost time. Time was wasted trying to understand the nature of the Central Asian dictator. To understand that, you cannot rely on a regime whose foundation of violence and state-sponsored terror.

We fully agree with Presidents Bush and Putin when they say, in one voice, that dialogue with terrorists is impossible. But we do not understand when some leaders want to hold a sincere dialogue with a chief architect of state terror in Central Asia.

Please allow me to sum up, and I have said, with the following conclusion:

There is no state in all of Central Asia that depends on the will of just one person like Uzbekistan does.

But on the other hand, this is what makes a dictatorship so weak. By replacing one person, you can change not only the situation in Uzbekistan, but indeed the entire region. As Karimov himself likes to say, "No man, no problem."

I'm not calling for a violent overthrow of the Uzbek ruler; I'm saying aloud what could happen if the international community finally takes real measures to weaken the Uzbek dictator's regime.

Wouldn't it be more logical to concentrate efforts on weakening the unlimited power of one person, rather than concentrating efforts on building and developing democratic institutions that would anyway depend on the will of just one person?

Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you, Mr. Salih.

And for our final analysis, an analysis of some of the presentations before perhaps, Dr. Olcott?

Dr. OLCOTT. I will make some general comments. And by implication, will be analyzing the presentations just before me.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. It's always a privilege to appear before this Commission, whether at a hearing or at a briefing. And it's a particular honor today, as I'm sharing the platform with a number of individuals who have made great personal sacrifices in the cause of building democracy in Uzbekistan.

As each of the proceeding speakers has through their own life story clearly attested, the challenge of building democracy in Uzbekistan is a daunting and frustrating one. Democratic activists operating inside the country put themselves and their families at great risk, and the risk continues for those who leave their Uzbek homeland to work for this cause abroad.

While those in the United States and other Western-based NGOs working toward the goal of a democratic Uzbekistan find it at best a frustrating situation when they try and set up to work inside the country, they are worse yet increasingly finding it effectively impossible to do so. So a frustrating situation has become an impossible one.

The situation that U.S. legislators working with this region confront is no less challenging, as is that found by other U.S. policymakers and concerned U.S. citizens.

But ways must be found to: one, keep the aspirations of Uzbek citizens for democracy alive; two, increase the capacity of Uzbek elites and citizens alike to make a smooth transition to democracy when circumstances make such a transition more supportable; three, develop U.S.-funded programs that are able to make the domestic Uzbek environment more supportive of internal political change, programs which, if not supported by the Uzbek Government, are able to safely exist without the support of the Uzbek Government; finally, five, to not sacrifice U.S. short-, medium-, and long-term interests in the region and more generally, in the process.

These are very ambitious goals and would be difficult even under the very best of circumstances, even if there were far more financial resources available to U.S. policy-makers to deploy in this region than is currently the case.

Regardless of the hard financial times some looking for money for this region may find themselves in, it would improve the effectiveness of U.S. policies if we were able to be better aware of the circumstances on the ground in Uzbekistan, as well as the potential undesired, but in some cases usually predictable, outcomes of our policies.

I'd like to make a few general points about the situation on the ground in Uzbekistan and what it means to the United States and then conclude with some very brief policy recommendations that I think are both politically and financially viable in current circumstances.

Although, unlike everybody else on the platform, I am not a native to the region, I have traveled to the region, to Uzbekistan regularly for over 30 years and have been in some of the more distant corners of that republic.

Some comments about Uzbek political opposition within and outside of Uzbekistan. First, as we have heard in today's hearing, the opposition—and this is one of the understatement, I apologize—as we heard in today's hearing, the opposition in political exile is not united.

But I do not believe, united or not, that this lack of unity will play a major role in their success or failure. That is a more important point.

Second, the Uzbeks are not going to import a political revolution. A successful revolution of the “color” type in Uzbekistan must be made by forces that are almost entirely based within the country, made with strong internal elite support, as well as a population willing to go out on the streets.

Even before Andijon, elite support for change was largely a “parlor” phenomenon, although there was a growing number of mid- and even senior-level administrators and policymakers who lamented Karimov's “wrong turns,” and I put that in quote, in 1997, 1998, and 2003–2004. But virtually all of these did so in private. Now, post-Andijon and with the dismissals and arrests, as we heard today, of several politically prominent individuals, the closet reformers have dug deeper into anonymity, venting their displeasure in even smaller circles.

Finally, Uzbekistan does—and I'm going to talk about this next—have a small, armed opposition. Most of these people in some way are connected to the remnants of a mutated Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. And though numerically insignificant—and I underline this, numerically insignificant—in a weak state like Uzbekistan, even such a small force can be destructive, especially if they enjoy the support of a few individuals found in the security ministries.

Next, I'd like to say a few words about the nature of the Islamic threat, as I understand it, the role of Islam in Uzbekistan. That is a point I think that I do differ with some of those gathered here.

First, while I do believe that—and this is an area where I have spent a lot of time working in the last several years—first, while I do believe that Islamic radicalism is attractive to only a narrow band of Uzbek believers and that the majority of believers and the overwhelming majority of the older generation of believers are supportive of traditional Hanafi Islamic teachings, there is also a process of globalization going on among Uzbekistan's believers, which is working to the advantage of those advocating more radical forms of Islam.

These include those advocates of an organization—these radical forms such as Hizb'ut Tahrir, but also more importantly they include religious forces that enjoy greater credibility publicly among believers. They include clerics who are Salafi in orientation, Salafist in orientation, much like the Muslim Brethren.

And they also, even more importantly, include revisionist Hanafists clerics who advocate abandoning traditional Hanafi teachings in favor of teachings more akin to that that goes on in state-sponsored seminaries in a number of Gulf States. Most of this last group of people are existing fully under the umbrella of state-supported Islam, and they are changing public attitudes towards Islam.

There is nothing that is inherently dangerous in this, but it is important to note that there is more dynamism in Uzbekistan's religious establishment than in the secular political and educational establishment currently in Uzbekistan.

And that the population who will hopefully be openly courted by advocates of secular democratic ideals after a Karimov transition, will be fundamentally different than the community that ERK and Birlik worked with in their founding days.

Next, and probably most sadly, part of the younger generation of Uzbeks, the under 25s, are far more globally savvy than was ever envisioned 15 years ago. Now, that's not the sad part. But the degradation of education, health care, and general living standards in the many densely populated urban and rural areas goes far beyond what was anticipated, even by the government in particular, which means that a growing percentage of Uzbek youth are experiencing upbringings that isolate them from the values of the more privileged minority that we spoke of in the beginning that is being tied to global secular tendencies.

Next, I want to make two sets of comments and then a brief conclusion. The security of the Karimov regime, whether we like it or not—and I assume that the overwhelming, if not everyone in the room doesn't like it, Karimov has done a much better job rebuilding the support structure for his power post-Andijon than most believed would be the case a year ago.

He has carried out a purge of his power ministries, leaving the SNB with clear domination over the MVD. And the Ministry of Defense has reoriented itself toward Russia and its SCO partners.

While the economic picture is opaque at best, the situation in some regions and in some sectors of society have improved somewhat. High energy prices and high gold prices clearly have benefited the Karimov regime's ability to mute, at least temporarily, the economic displeasure of some groups of the population.

Next, improved relations with Russia and Kazakhstan provide a greater opportunity for trickle-down in new and medium- and large-size investments, as do improved trade with China.

A few words now on international relations of Uzbekistan. I mean, again, this is not a happy picture from the point of view of many in this room. Karimov has managed to break out in recent months. He has managed to break out to a certain degree of the diplomatic isolation that Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States sought to impose.

While Russia and China never provided Karimov with the broad security guarantees he sought, they have taken smaller steps to help Karimov improve his security situation, both in terms of loans for military upgrades, greater intelligence-sharing, and opening up the prospect of shared military operations.

Led by the Germans, some Europeans are rethinking their ostracism of the Uzbeks.

But at the same time, Karimov has more focused his anger toward the U.S. than ever before, making the conditions for the U.S. Embassy, as well as, of course, for U.S. NGOs difficult, if not impossible.

He is effectively behaving like a lover scorned. And Karimov's anger is at what he saw as the false promises of the post-9/11 strategic partnership with the United States and also based on his belief that there are some elements in the U.S. administration who would be willing to throw their weight in favor of his ouster in some non-military form.

Finally, the current relationship with Uzbekistan has had costs to the United States.

The loss of the Karsi-Khanabad base has made the United States more dependant upon a weak, and at best, incompetent regime in Kyrgyzstan.

U.S. regional economic initiatives, which are very critical to the long-term survival of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, have become more problematic because of Uzbekistan's refusal to participate in them, at a time, though, that Uzbekistan is beginning for the first time to participate in common Central Asian trade activities and Russian-oriented trade activities.

The fact that alternative transport routes that bypass Russia also bypass Uzbekistan really creates the only alternative to Russia for Tajikistan and Afghanistan to be very impenetrable transit routes through the high mountains of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

It has also strengthened Chinese influence in the region, as transport options through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to China are increasing. And that has worked not just to the detriment of U.S. interests in the area, but it also makes long-term projects that depend on transport to India less likely to win over those projects that depend on transports for China.

Finally, it has become harder for the United States to directly engage with the next generation of Uzbeks, and it's become very, very difficult for young Uzbeks to get travel and study opportunities in the United States. This is not a cheerful picture.

Let me say, in conclusion, obviously none of this is argument for the United States to reverse the thrust of the post-Andijon policy towards Uzbekistan, a policy which already has strong support in Congress due to Uzbekistan's highly dubious human rights record even before the Andijon events.

But I would disagree with my honored speaker to the left. I believe that Karimov has found ways to minimize the damage of U.S. policy to him personally, to his family, and to his regime, from the efforts at isolation by the United States and by the Euro-

peans, and that the new investors coming from Russia and China are likely to stay in the large energy projects that Western investors eschewed from the beginning.

Finally, in conclusion, eventually Karimov will leave office. Even if he runs in 2007, old age and ill health will eventually overtake him. But the United States faces an enormous challenge in Uzbekistan until he does and until there is a political situation on the ground that creates the opportunity for greater political openness, which Karimov's hand-off of power to a hand-picked successor need not necessarily produce.

Given this, the United States must find way to engage the Uzbek population, through a variety of educational and media-based outreaches. Much of the media work can be done without direct reengagement of the Uzbek Government, and maybe some of the education work can be done through non-U.S. partners.

But unless someone works with the Uzbeks to get improvements in basic primary and secondary education, especially in rural areas, the United States may succeed in helping develop a narrow band of secular Western-trained potential elites, largely trained abroad, but these individuals will be wholly alien from the society they seek to govern.

Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you very much for your presentation. We do have a few minutes this afternoon to open the floor up for questions from the audience, and I would just ask that you come to the front, and state your name and your affiliation, and present your question to a particular member of the panel.

And as those of you in the audience are getting your thoughts together on that front, I will proceed with a question of my own. When I was in Uzbekistan in February, the government officials decided that it would not be in their interest to spend their time meeting with me.

But I did have some very interesting meetings with a number of others, private individuals in the country, and also was able to go to Andijon and to the Fergana Valley. So I appreciated that opportunity. But one of the messages that was fairly consistent was an expressed concern, which Dr. Olcott was just referring to, and that is the concern of the younger generation and a question about the quality of education that was being provided to those of academic years.

And I was wondering: How do you see the prospects for independent thinkers, including those within the political opposition or those that desire to be politically active, to integrate new ideas, democratic thought and discussion among the younger generation?

Mr. UMAROV. Your question is directed to?

Ms. TAFT. Mr. Salih, very good.

Mr. UMAROV. Maybe one of the ways—I'm sorry that I'm kind of—I just have one comment here before we can have your comment there. Perhaps one of the ways of increasing the educational system can be achieved is—that way, all of this is due to the complete economic restructure in Uzbekistan.

The economic system is not working, is not efficient at all. And by increasing the economic—by adding economic reforms and improving the economic situation in Uzbekistan—the educational system, will, not eventually, will have to be improved, as well. Just one small comment that I wanted to add before—

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. The regime has destroyed or collapsed, not only politically, but also the social structure of the country. That includes education, also. So therefore we need to look into the root cause of the problem.

And the Soviet system that had developed the education system, the education infrastructure in Uzbekistan, when it gained its independence, has exhausted. And the new ideology, that Karimov tried to restore—the ideology of the old, greater ancestors of the Uzbek nation.

So the new program, the new system that Karimov tried to restore, recalling and bringing back the old, greater ancestors of Uzbek failed. And that's why I believe only that the change of the regime is the right treatment towards improvement of education system in Uzbekistan.

Dr. OLCOTT. I'd like to throw something in. I think that, actually, Karimov did a much better job with the educational system in Uzbekistan than was done in a lot of neighboring states. There's a lot of money spent in rural schools; there's a lot of money put into Uzbek textbooks.

I think the examples of Uzbek history—certainly, the ones that there was a need—and the way there's a strong politicization going on. But I think that the key, if we're talking about salvaging a generation, it's to maintain the notion that rural youth get basic science and math education.

This is not an area of politicization. And in the absence of attention to rural education, I think that Uzbekistan will face a situation that's analogous to Pakistan, where the only education on offer is religious education.

That's why I talked at the end about, if the U.S. Government is not going to be able to act or shouldn't act there, it should look for partners that are able to act there, because simply finding ways to assist the Uzbek population, especially the rural population, to continue to get quality primary and early secondary education is one of the only ways that will keep any hope of building a democracy in the longer run alive, or else this process of radicalization in another generation will have gone a lot further.

The former Soviet Union is the one place where you find universal literacy, basic primary education. That is now in decline. Most of the other places we've dealt with in post-independence period, they've had a decline in education, but not a dramatic fall in the percentage of literacy. Places like Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, women in Tajikistan, all run the risk of creating a next generation that will not be literate or will have minimum functional literacy. That is a huge threat to long-term democracy building.

Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. One more comment, and then you go ahead.

Mr. UMAROV. I would definitely like to agree with both speakers regarding the comments on the educational system. Although the many schools were built in Uzbekistan, we do have many schools which do have everything but the teachers themselves. They don't receive good salary; I mean, the salary of a teacher is maybe about \$20, \$30 per month.

On top of everything else, they have to do renovations in school because everything is expected of the teachers. When students come to schools, they are expected to pay additional money to paint the building, paint the floor, bring your desk, to do something.

And even though that the children don't have this money, some families don't have this money. And if the parents would not bring the money, the children will not get good grades. And by the time since parents are bringing those money, children are thinking, "Why should we study? We don't want to study."

And unless the reforms will be introduced and additional money would be, you know, given to teachers to school people, it will not—I mean, it's going to continue to deteriorate. And at the same time, I also agree of your comments, as well. I just wanted to add this.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you.

Yes, please identify yourself.

QUESTIONER. My name is Magina Molokova. I'm just an observer here today.

But my question goes to Mr. Polat, Mr. Umarov and Mr. Salih. As representatives of two parties, Birlik and ERK, or ERK Party and Birlik movement, and also the new Sunshine Coalition, we're talking here about Karimov, about how bad the regime is. And I cannot agree with you more than that. We all know what the regime is like.

But what do you offer as an alternative should the regime leave? Should Karimov step down, what do you, in particular—do you have programs? Do you have a way to implement reforms? Do you have reforms to implement, in general?

We are talking here in front of the groups of people, but what do you have to offer to Uzbek people in general? Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. That's a good question. I would ask that maybe you mention the top three or four priorities.

Mr. POLAT. That's a question for everybody?

Ms. TAFT. Yes.

Mr. POLAT. I can begin?

It's very popular question. Everybody, almost everybody asks about it. Of course, we have programs. But I cannot explain all details of these programs here, but I will say the same.

It is not necessary to open America, which is a Russian proverb. I don't know. Maybe you are using it, too. It means it's not necessary to find something new, because even in former Soviet blocs about 20 countries, socialist countries, already passed this transition period. At least we have this experience.

So that's why, using this experience, we have to go from this post-socialism system, democratic market economy-based system. So we have this program, and I recently wrote about it. Now I put it in English in Russian text, in general.

But I think there is not any principal difficult. There is necessary to begin political reforms in Uzbekistan and then, step by step, we have to do, by the way, what other republics of the former Soviet Union passed now.

Thank you.

Mr. UMAROV. As was mentioned during my speech, the Sunshine Coalition is currently working on the international advisory council, Economic Advisory Council. Although, unfortunately, our improvements have not been as active as we wanted to be, due to the imprisonment, but we're still working on this.

The Economic Advisory Council idea is to create the economic platform for reforms. There are several Uzbek—there was an Uzbek council of economists created who developed a paper on the current situation in Uzbekistan, following—and this first deliverable was already done and was published on the Sunshine Uzbekistan Web site, if you all would like to go there and take a look.

Following this first drift, it's supposed to be reviewed by international advisers, which will consist of economists around the world, as United States, Europe, Russia, and other developing countries who had passed through this stage, hopefully adding value to this.

And hopefully, after the international advisory group, as well as the local Uzbeks, economists will finish this paper, which is on the way. We do expect to send this paper to several movements, at the same time, at official and who are also in exile, because if just a certain group of people will do this and without the input of other movements or official organizations, it will not be possible. I mean, there's not going to be any sense of this paper.

So it is on the way to do it. And first, the deliverable is also posted on the Internet. Please take a look at the Web site.

Thank you.

Ms. TAFT. Mr. Salih?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. We have actually our reforms program available on our Web site, but let me just outline three main priorities that I believe must be considered immediately.

I would like to say that the first reforms should be political reforms, because Karimov himself has been always saying that there are no economic reforms without political reforms. In this maybe he's right, because without the changes in political structure, without political reforms, there wouldn't be success in economic reforms.

Second, I must say that Uzbekistan, we should admit, is a great agricultural country. And the reforms in agricultural sector would have a significant impact. And also the significance of medium- and small-sized businesses, entrepreneurship would also have vital importance in implementing reforms.

And I must also say that the social reforms, the social programs that are currently implemented in Uzbekistan are all Soviet-style reforms, Soviet-style social programs, and these need to be changed. And these are the sectors that we would start working at as priorities.

Ms. TAFT. Thank you very much.

For our next question, I think we'll just—before you start, I think we'll have time for the two of you to ask your questions, and then—no, ask your question. He can ask his question, and then—

QUESTIONER. I am a reporter with the Voice of America. I want to specifically address Mr. Polat and Mr. Salih, because it's been more than a decade since you both left Uzbekistan, and the country is not the same. The majority of the Uzbek population is young people whose ages are below 35.

So if you look at it, the majority of Uzbek population do not know about you or know very little about you. What are you doing to reach out to them? And how do you think you can be attractive to that generation, a new generation that probably will vote for you if you get to the political, you know, stage in Uzbekistan?

OK, thank you.

QUESTIONER. I think my question dovetails a bit with that. I'm Peter Sinn of Columbia University.

I'm interested in how your movements are able to interact with the population and to what degree there is debate that you are aware of? A few years ago, I spoke with

Abdurahim Polat, and he told me he was on the phone constantly, in constant contact with people in his movement.

And Gulam Umarov, more than a year ago, I met with Nadira Khidoyatova. And, you know, I was able to see the other portions of your movement.

And for Muhammad Salih, you know, so many members of your movement are now in New York in political asylum cases. I mean, we're seeing the effects of the attempt to distribute materials and things.

What is the level of debate that you are seeing from within your movements?

Mr. POLAT. I'm very sorry. Somebody can translate maybe question? Believe me, I'm speaking English little bit, but I cannot understand anything, because—yes, so not you, but somebody who can translate it?

[Audience member translates.]

Mr. POLAT. OK, I understand. That's why my English is very bad, because I don't have any communication in United States. I only come to Washington in order to participate in Helsinki Commission. It's real. And so I'm saying, I'm not living in United States, just I'm staying.

I'm living actually in Uzbekistan, every day talking with people. Our party is in Uzbekistan, in a single party, or only one party. Actually, it's working. Of course, I cannot say we are ready today to take power by force or something, but it is only one party, that is working in Uzbekistan.

And situation, of course [inaudible] but we have to look to reality. Some people, other parties, because already [inaudible] here, they have done—I think they don't have any contact even with their members, and they are talking here about only bad, bad, bad, bad.

And I'm talking here, it's so bad, it's so terrible, Karimov is killer. Who will come to opposition? Who will come? So that's why I say everything. We have to tell reality.

Now, everybody says, "Oh, bad, bad." They said the same 2 years ago, but 2 years ago and compare this today, it was paradise in Uzbekistan. When I talk about it even here, some people say, "I cannot believe it." Other people says, "Oh, you are productive." That word, productive. "You are [inaudible] for Karimov." No, [inaudible] but we have to look at reality.

If we will say bad in Uzbekistan, Karimov will kill them, nobody will come to opposition. But if I remember—I didn't know about this. I talked with you. I talk by telephone. I talk if United States will not do everything for us, they are doing already what?

Before [inaudible] you know this word, "zatoi" [stagnation]. It was everything "zatoi." What is "zakstoy" in English? There was not even wind. If we are on the ocean, and we have the sheets, and we have sailors, everything but if not wind, we cannot move. But if they have wind, by using system of sails, you can go even against the wind.

So United States created winter in Uzbekistan. And absolutely I am not angry with people. No, now the United States doesn't have any points of influence in Uzbekistan. It's wrong. The United States can influence in every way, including China, Russia, Korea. But they either want it or not.

But I talked about it. They are very careful. If actually I have to understand United States, too. Now, I told you about what in Uzbek language, riding in his sights about West is end, because they are not giving birth to kids, only two kids, and even the West very

soon will be Islam country. And here coming, “Oh, I’m for democracy,” you will [inaudible] for us.

That’s why my obligation as opposition leader, democratic opposition leader, set up inside democratic opposition. Not everything is OK, but we’re trying to fight even with them, that they’re liar, they’re—what is it—two-faced, here saying about democracy [inaudible] is saying about West. They want to help the West, but they say West will be end, not after 1,000 years. In 2050, West will be Islamic country. And these are words Muhammad Salih.

And here, he’s coming here in Russian talking about democracy. So that’s why we have to explain to our people, and we explain it not only by telephone, by telephone I am talking with only leaders of regional organizations. I forgot today I have to bring to show you, because it is very interesting when you show it, not always talking.

We are publishing in Uzbekistan—but not in Uzbekistan inside, outside Uzbekistan publishing 3,000 circulation journal and distributing it in Uzbekistan. Some people don’t believe, but if don’t believe, they have to go to check it. But we try to reach our people, and we don’t say that Karimov killed, or Karimov is bad. We say, “Yes, he is dictatorship country.”

Even State Department in its report doesn’t say dictatorship country, but authoritarian country. But actually, if we’re very frank, I think I may agree with this. It’s not dictatorship country, but authoritarian. Dictatorship country, it’s Saddam Hussein, Stalin. You can image now all my brothers working in universities and some people say, “Oh, he’s working for the opposition, but his brother is working. That’s why we don’t believe him.”

But, no, even one fact you can interpret truth besides. So many people say it means I am not good, but I think, no, it means Karimov is a little bit different from Stalin and from Saddam Hussein. And now we have opportunity to work over there. And it’s not only my imagination.

We now have 26,000 registered people. So we are working. We are contacting. And I think, if United States will help, the West will help, we could reach more high-level goals. But now we didn’t see about what help, even for what we have.

I’m not saying give us something 100 percent everything, but something. But we didn’t need—have now almost anything.

Ms. TAFT. Mr. Salih?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. I hoped that—I was thinking we would be discussing here more the issues of political change or political reforms, the political situation in Uzbekistan, not like, you know, inter-fractional or inter-group debates, which is the old records, or to score the old records. Recently, I came from Uzbekistan where I live and work.

We’ve been criticizing—we understand the government, and we’ve been criticizing the government, but there are various approaches of criticizing it. And the position of the Birlik leader is criticizing with the government’s view.

We need to concentrate, we need to focus on political changes, to bring forward the issue of putting Uzbekistan on a democratic path. That must be the main agenda of today. That’s why it’s important to define the character or the personality of leaders of opposition, what is their position, what side their standing for. That’s why I didn’t want to actually attend the talk by Polat, but I did it.

Thank you. I can answer your questions if you have them.

Ms. TAFT. I do believe there are some questions that are on the table. The question is, if I remember correctly, what is the dialogue that's happening with the younger generation? And, as well, what dialogue is there among the various groups within the country?

And perhaps Mr. Umarov would like to respond to the questions.

Mr. UMAROV. Thank you.

I will try very briefly, as I know everyone is very tired, very briefly to explain our problems of communications in Uzbekistan. We do have this problem communicating. First of all, everyone is afraid to talk openly. When you try to speak over the phone, everyone trying not to speak about it or they're trying to speak about it over some kind of different telephones. So there's definitely a problem with communications.

However, the communications inside Uzbekistan, they do communicate over there, but it's within Uzbekistan. And the link between us communicating with them is extremely hard. The only open way to speak—I mean, from personal standpoint of view, from all of our other people that we know that we are keeping in contact with, unless it's some kind of form of the Internet or something, where we try to direct them to the Internet cafe and try to understand what's going on from whatever meeting that they were into, it's very hard.

The other way of communications is trying to go there as often as possible, which we do, maybe not me directly, but some of the people that we know are trying to go over there directly, come back with the feedback.

The only person who's brave enough to talk to us openly over the phone, who is not afraid of anything, from my personal point of view, not only person, only persons is Nigara and Nadira Khidoyatova. With them, we can discuss whatever topic we want over the phone.

But, of course, there is a problem, because you're beginning to receive one-sided information. But this is just—I'm telling you the information that we—I mean, what kind of problems that we have. But there is definitely a problem. I hope I answered it directly.

Ms. TAFT. Our time has come to a close. I appreciate everyone coming today.

I'm not sure if we've answered the question of what are the prospects for change in Uzbekistan. Perhaps we've gotten an insight into the level of dialogue that is happening, such as it is. And we appreciate the time to hear from each of our presenters today, and we look forward to the next time to getting together.

Thank you.

[Whereupon the briefing ended at 5:53 p.m.]

APPENDICES

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ABDURAHIM POLAT, CHAIRMAN OF THE BIRLIK PARTY

We are going to talk about democratic changes in Uzbekistan. These changes must happen. The possibility of changes depends on many factors. I would like to underline three of them that we can influence.

I. THE HELP OF USA AND THE WEST TO THE UZBEK DEMOCRATS

I am skeptical about the help of USA and the West. There are a lot of reasons for it. Let political scientists investigate it fully and make complete conclusions.

I will limit myself to two very small, but very characteristic examples.

1.1. Conference in DC. Several years ago I attended the Conference “Threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus” organized by a prominent University in DC. The main speaker was the professor from London. He made colorful and emotional speech without any significant evidences.

I asked him: “Do you really think that there is the threat. Can you give some more serious specific evidences?” Believe me, my question was not ironical. I really wanted to listen to some new facts.

His answer was: “Yes, I am sure. I heard about it from Radio BBC myself”.

There may not have been a Homeric laughter in the auditorium, but many people were giggling. It is another matter that after that event the organizer of Conference, famous professor Mr. Starr stopped sending me e-mail invitations for the similar pseudo-scientist arrangements.

I later heard more than once, even from the Americans, that the US President’s Administration, being misled by the conclusions of those kind of conferences and their organizers, is making wrong decisions, for example, regarding Uzbekistan.

I believe the reality is quite contrary. Those kinds of conferences were held to support the Administration’s decision.

This is nothing to be surprised about. I don’t know about other countries, but in Soviet Union this style of political technology was an ordinary method. That is why there was nothing for professor Frederick Starr to be ashamed about.

1.2. Another example. There were parliamentary elections in 2004 in Uzbekistan. “Birlik” Party announced its intention of participating in those elections and began to prepare for them one year before. We had financial problems for organizing training for our activists. Nevertheless, we solved these problems with great hardship.

We got to know absolutely by chance that NDI and IRI were conducting training for activists of small opposition groups in Tashkent. Our requests to them to help us did not find adequate respond. By the way, later, all trained groups refused to participate in elections. Only “Birlik” desperately fought to participate in elections.

Does somebody think that NDI and IRI did not know that “Birlik” is main opposition organization; only “Birlik” one year ago announced its intention to try to participate in the elections in any case, and was really preparing for the elections? Did they just forget to suggest us trainings that we needed? It is impossible. We think they knew everything.

But their goal was just to pretend to help Uzbek democratic opposition. They were giving clear signal to Uzbek authorities that they would not have any deals with real and main opposition group.

Analyzing those two and other tens of similar examples, “Birlik” expressed its concerns in the Statement of Party regarding first anniversary of Andijan massacre. Here is quotation from it:

“Birlik” has always called for the skilful combination of the external pressure on Karimov’s government with integrating Uzbekistan in all international institutions, and thereby, promoting democratization of our country.

It is more important to render support to pro-democratic forces inside the country. However, it is impossible to speak about any appraisable interest from the West to the problems of democrats in Uzbekistan. One of the reasons of this, most likely, is an excessive fear of the West from possible rising of Islamic radicalism in Central Asia, if the existing regime weakens and democracy develops.”

“Birlik” has been understanding very well that, though the threat of religious extremism exists, it should not be exaggerated. The only real alternative to present authorities in Uzbekistan is a democratic opposition. I want the West know if “Birlik” came to power we will be able to handle the problem regarding with extremism too.

The existing reality is that, Uzbek opposition is strong enough. Karimov has been trying to destroy the opposition physically for 17 years, but he couldn’t do it and will not be able do it. Since Uzbek opposition has a root in the nation. There is no another example in the Central Asia. It is not an insult to the neighbors, but one has to acknowledge that Kazakh and Kirgiz oppositions are opposition of the so-called “nomenklatura”. In the fighting for power, a part of “nomenklatura” rised against another one under democratic slogans. I am not saying it is bad. I am just underlining existing fact.

Unfortunately, the West has opinion different from us, that is why to make it brief, we are very skeptical about the support of the West.

II. WHAT WE ARE DOING OURSELVES AND WHAT WE WILL DO

The serious democratic changes in Uzbekistan can take place just after democratic opposition would set on its firm/strong feet. In 1992–1993 opposition was actually crushed down. Following years oppositionist were continuing their activity as human rights fighter and independent journalists. Beginning of the new century, the opposition began to re-establish itself. After the September 2001, when Uzbekistan became the partner of US in antiterrorist war, the process of rebuilding was going more effective.

In 2003 “Birlik” was fully re-created as political party at its Congress, which was held for first time for 10 years.

2.1. Registration of opposition parties. As democratic organization, we want to strengthen our position in country by participating in elections and enter to the parliament. In order to participate in elections, it is necessary to be a registered organization.

Beginning 2003 until May 2005, that is until Andijan events, “Birlik” 5 times filed documents for registration to the Ministry of Justice. We have been demonstrating for everybody that “Birlik” can organize not only meetings and demonstrations, but we can fight with existing authorities on legal space.

When we have fulfilled all requirements of the authorities regarding our documents, they have changed the Law On Political Parties in several days and raised the number of the necessary party members from 5 to 20 thousand. Karimov was sure that we never could raise number of our member to 20 thousand. But the during three next months, we have raised the number of the party members to 21 thousand. Right now we have 26 thousands registered members.

One has to understand what we did was almost impossible in dictatorship Uzbekistan but we did it.

During that process, Andijan massacre occurred and process of registration came to standstill. We are now resuming it.

However, OCSE, its Bureau on Democratization and Human Rights, and embassies of the western countries, including the USA, didn't do anything to help us. I am absolutely sure that before Andijan events when the relations between Uzbekistan and USA were rather high, USA could have helped significantly accelerate the process of registration or even complete it.

It is true Helsinki Commission was only organization, which tried to help us. The letter of Commission was send to President Karimov. But in spite of my pleading request, the letter was not only about "Birlik". There were enumerated parties, which didn't even apply for registration. In other words, it sent Uzbek authorities wrong signal. First, senders of the letter do not even know the real situation, second, therefore the letter is not serious and of no insistence.

Imagine, now that USA will demand from Hezbollah to stop hitting by rocket not only Israel but Israel and, for example, Australia. Who will accept this kind of demands seriously? It would be signal for Hezbollah to continue to hit Israel.

So by this manner, the wrong signal was sent to Karimov's government.

2.2. Elections 2004. Despite of all obstacles of authorities, we will continue try to participate in any elections. Only by this way we will gain experience of democratic struggle and ultimately breach wall of obstacles.

I already mentioned about our effort during parliamentary elections campaign in 2004.

It is understandable; in order not to give us the chance to participate in the elections, the authorities had denied to register "Birlik" Party. But Uzbek laws actually allow participating in elections for unregistered organizations, using possibility of nominating independent candidates both to parliament, and to presidency, on behalf of so-called initiative groups of the electors. So we used this possibility during parliamentary elections.

When "Birlik" has declared about its intentions, the authorities immediately began to stir. They changed immediately the law, increasing minimal number of participants of initiative groups from 100 persons to 300.

Even under new conditions we began to prepare to nominate our candidates to Parliament at least in 30–40 districts. By the way there are 120 members of Low Chamber of Parliament and accordingly 120 electoral districts.

What happened then? In all districts where our activists had began organizing meetings of the initiative groups, employees of the local administrations, officers of the special services and police literally went house-by-house and warned the people that they should not go on meetings, organized by "Birlik", which is an enemy of the state and personally of president Karimov. The most active people were brought, often on night, to

police and were threatened with arrest and other large troubles for members of their families.

In spite of frantic resistance of the authorities, we could hold meetings of initiative groups of electors in 10 electoral districts. So, 10 activists of “Birlik” were put forward as candidates to lower chamber of the Uzbek parliament, among them 2 vice-chairman’s of the party—Pulat Ohunov (Andijan region) and Ismail Dadazhanov (Fergana area).

After that, the fighting went to the level of the election commissions, which had to register the candidates. In majority districts, where our candidates were put forward, election commissions simply scattered, they did not appear on work offices before the end of the registration period. Our appeals to Central Election Commission remained without consideration.

One has to understand what we did was almost impossible in dictatorship Uzbekistan but we did it.

Regrettably, OCSE, its Bureau on Democratization and Human Rights, and embassies of the western countries, including the USA, again remained deaf against our request to help us.

That days the high level delegation of Department of State visited Uzbekistan. Again, we requested, we begged the Chairman of Delegation to officially meet with both our nominees and representatives of Central Election Commission with aiming to promote process of registration of opposition candidates. But there was only one meeting with one of nominees in unofficial situation.

We have just one explanation for these kinds of facts. The West have been desperately scaring of possibility of raising Islamic extremism and prefers not to irritate Uzbek regime instead of helping Uzbek democrats.

2.3. Presidential Elections—2007. In this difficult situation, when terrible dictatorship is withstanding against us, we are going to participate in upcoming presidential elections. The election campaign was beginning with a statements of “Birlik” which called all opposition groups to be united and participate in election with common candidate. Now all groups except small fraction of “Erk” Party support this proposal. I think there will not be a big problem and the united opposition will choose presidential candidate within several months.

We are very worried, will the West and USA help us in this hard period. What help do we need?

Because of all our previous even tiny requests didn’t find adequate response, now I am very careful.

First. We are going to hold the All-opposition Convention either in one countries of CIS or East Europe or USA. We need help, from getting permission of country where the Convention will be held to covering some of the expenses.

Second. It is impossible even to think about democracy and democratic changes without free mass media. This matter becomes vital in connection with upcoming presidential elections.

There is only one independent from government publication which have been continuously publishing during 10 last year—the opposition Journal “Harakat”. It is public-political, social-economic and human rights publication.

The circulation of this bimonthly journal is 3 thousand per issue. But it is important that practically whole circulation spreads in Uzbekistan.

Its circulation is insufficient for country with population 26 million people, especially on the eve of elections. Now we are going to increase its circulation up to 20 thousands per issue and apply to US organizations to help cover extra expenses. But we are not sure that we will get adequate respond again. I don't know can Helsinki Commission support us in this case.

III. ABOUT OF UNITY AND DISUNITY OPPOSITION

I am aware that many people like to talk about the disunity of the Uzbek opposition. Of course, who can image unity of democratic and radical Islamic opposition?

Yes, there are some opposition groups, which are sometimes using democratic phraseology, but they are not democratic in principle. One of the thus group is fraction of "Erk" Party leading by Salay Madaminov. All other groups are united and as I talked above they are going to the presidential elections together.

Why we have been considering this group rather extremist than democratic? Although there are a lot of examples, I will very short and give just one of them.

Many people knew the statement of chairman of this fraction Salay Madaminov/Muhammad Salih, published in the newspaper "Erk": "We have to raise our youth generation in that way, that they have to go to death without thinking, if order was given by the name of Allah". Does it not seem by the words of the leader of this party that it was Usama bin Laden himself speaking?

I think Allah would be against of such stating of the problem. He gave the people a head and to live wisely using it is more correct interpretation of Islamic values.

I am agreeing now with people, who say it was written a long time ago. We have to live with today's problems without looking back; we have to look forward.

In my hand the article, which are written these days. More precisely, June 26, 2006. Name of the article is: "We need the Savior".

It is very boring paper. I will give just short content by couple quotations: "So, the West is going to the end. Because, it is drowning in the bog of social-moral illnesses. Their woman cannot give birth to more then 2 kids. It is not enough to maintain us as humanity. China will drown by another reason. Only Muslims will survive, because we are following hadis of Prophet Muhammad, Who said: "Reproduce". That is way our women has at least 4 children. Only Islam conforms to democracy. Very soon the West will understand it and will lead Islam itself. If person (not Muslim, but any person) is perfect there should be democracy in his head and Islam in the heart."

"There is a precise time when Islam will be only and common religion of the Humanity. It will be about 2050. That time we have to have leaders who will lead us. One of them is already among us. In 2050 he will be just 100 years old. But he will still be young by spirit and will help us. His name is Muhammag Salih, the leader of "Erk".

If somebody would like to read this work of art he have to be very hurry. Because, I think it will be removed from sites of "Erk" Party as soon as possible after my speech. The Article is signed not by Muhammad Salih, although it is written by him, but signed by the name of Chairman of un-existing youth wing of "Erk"Party.

Do your remember the quotation from the article of politician, which was written in 1994. He wrote about youth population of members of "Erk," who will go to death. Now

I see that they are deciding the same problems without raising suicide bombers, but reproducing.

At the same time Muhammad Salih has openly been claiming that he is the founder of the National Salvation Committee. It is another matter that this organization exists only in the mind of several people. More important is the fact that this Organization's charter is unconstitutional. This has created a very dangerous situation. On one hand, there are the statements of those people including Salay Madaminov, that their Office of the National Salvation Committee is in Turkey and that the National Intelligence Organization (it's more known by Turkish abbr. MIT) of Turkey guards it. On the other hand, there is the above-mentioned article of the founder of the so-called National Salvation Committee, openly directed to increasing tension between Islamic and non-Islamic world.

This is definitely a provocation, first of all against the current government of Turkey and Islamic world in general. It became more sensitive right now when current Turkish government is under fire from those who are trying to accuse it of non-secular politics.

So I want to say for people who are supposedly uncomfortable about the disunity Uzbek democratic opposition and want to unite us: Democratic opposition of Uzbekistan is united. And it cannot be together with these fanatics and ignorants of this fraction of "Erk". We have different ways.

We, Uzbek democrats need support of the USA and the West. But as I say repeatedly there is not interest from that side to our problems. I hope I was heard today, both at last and at least.

Thank you.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MARTHA BRILL OLCOTT, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.

It is always a privilege to appear before the Commission, whether at a hearing or at a briefing. It is a particular honor today, as I am sharing the platform with a number of individuals, who have made great personal sacrifices in the cause of building democracy in Uzbekistan.

As each of the preceding speakers has through their own life stories clearly attested, the challenge of building democracy in Uzbekistan is a daunting and frustrating one. Democracy activists operating inside the country put themselves, and their families, at great risk, and the risk continues for those who leave their Uzbek homeland to work for this cause abroad. While those in U.S. and other western funded NGOs working toward the goal of a democratic Uzbekistan find, at best, a frustrating situation when they try and set up work inside the country, and increasingly they are finding it effectively impossible to do so.

The situation that U.S. legislators concerned with this region confront is a very challenging one, as do all other U.S. policy-makers and concerned citizens. For ways must be found to

- Keep the aspirations of Uzbekistan's citizens for democracy alive,
- Increase the capacity of Uzbek elites and citizens alike to make a smooth transition to democracy, when circumstances make such a transition more supportable.
- Develop U.S. funded programs that are able to make the domestic Uzbek environment more supportive of internal political change, programs which if not supported by the Uzbek government are able to safely exist without its support.
- To not sacrifice, U.S. short, medium and long-term interests in the region and more generally, in the process.

These are very ambitious goals, and would be difficult to achieve even under the best of circumstances, when there were far more financial resources available to U.S. policy-makers to deploy in this region than is currently the case. Regardless, we will improve the effectiveness of our policies if we are better aware of the circumstances on the ground in Uzbekistan, as well as of the potential undesired but in some cases easily predictable outcomes of our policies.

I would like to make a few general points about the situation on the ground in Uzbekistan, what it means for the U.S. and then conclude with some policy recommendations that I think are politically and financially viable in the current circumstances.

Again, although I am not native to the region, I have traveled there regularly for over thirty years, and have been to many of the more distant corners of Uzbekistan.

Uzbek Political Opposition within and outside Uzbekistan:

- As we have heard in today's hearing, the opposition in political exile is not united. But I do not believe that this will play a major role in their success or failure.

- The Uzbeks are not going to import a political revolution. A successful revolution, of the “color” type must be made by forces almost entirely based within the country, with strong internal elite support, as well as a population willing to go out of the street.

- Even before Andijian, elite support for change was largely a “parlor” phenomenon, with the growing number of mid and even senior level administrators and policy-makers who lamented Karimov’s “wrong turns” of 1997–1998, and 2003–2004, doing so in private. Now, post-Andijian and the dismissals and arrests of a few politically prominent individuals, the closet reformers have dug down deeper into anonymity, venting their displeasure in ever smaller circles.

- Uzbekistan does have a small, armed opposition, most in some ways connected to the remnants of a mutated Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, and though numerically insignificant in a weak state like Uzbekistan they can be destructive, especially if they enjoy even the support of a few individuals from the security ministries.

The Nature of the Islamic Threat

- While I do believe that Islamic radicalism is attractive to only a narrow band of Uzbek believers, and that the majority of believers, and the overwhelming majority of the older generation of believers are supportive of traditional Hanafi Islamic teachings, there is also a process of “globalization” going on among Uzbekistan’s believers, which is working to the advantage of those advocating more radical forms of Islam such radical forms include Hizb’ut Tahrir but also more important religious forces that enjoy greater public credibility such as ‘salafists’ (of the Muslim brethren type) and revisionist-Hanafists who advocates abandoning traditional Hanafi teachings in favor of teachings more akin to those of state-sponsored seminaries in the number of Gulf States. This last group operates within the officially recognized Uzbek Clerical structure.

- There is nothing inherently dangerous in this, but it is important to note that there is more dynamism in Uzbekistan’s religious establishment, than in their secular political and educational establishment. And the population, who hopefully openly courted by advocates of secular democratic ideals after a Karimov transition, will be fundamentally different than the community that Erk and Birlik worked with in their founding days.

- Part of the younger generation of Uzbeks, the under 25s are far more globally savvy than was ever envisioned 15 years ago, while the degradation of education, healthcare and general living standards in many densely populated urban and rural areas goes far beyond what was anticipated, by the government in particular, means that a growing percentage of Uzbek youth are experiencing upbringing that isolates them from the values of a more privileged minority.

The Security of the Karimov Regime

- Karimov has done a much better job in rebuilding the support structure for his power than most believed popular a year ago.

- He has carried out a purge of his “power ministries” leaving the SNB with clear domination over the MVD, and with the Ministry of Defense reoriented toward Russia, and its SCO partners.

- While the economic picture is opaque, the situation in some regions, and in some sectors of society have improved somewhat. High energy prices and high gold prices clearly benefit the Karimov regime's ability to mute at least temporarily economic displeasure of at least some groups of the population.

- Improved relations with Russia and Kazakhstan provide greater opportunity for trickle down and new medium and large-scale investment, as do improved trade relations with China

International Relations of Uzbekistan

- Karimov has managed to break out of the diplomatic isolation that Europe and to a lesser extent the U.S. sought to impose.

- While Russia and China never provided Karimov with the broad security guarantees he sought, they have taken smaller steps to help Karimov improve his security situation; both in terms of loans for military upgrades, greater intelligence sharing, and opening up the prospect of shared military operations.

- Led by the Germans, some Europeans are rethinking their ostracism of the Uzbeks.

- But Karimov is more focused in his anger toward the U.S. than ever before, making the conditions of for the U.S. embassy, as well of course, of U.S. funded NGOs difficult to impossible.

- He is effectively behaving like "a lover scorned," angry at what he sees as one false promises of one post 9/11 strategic partnership and Karimov seems to believe that some elements in the U.S. administration would be eager to throw the weight of the U.S. (in some non-military form) in favor of his ouster.

The Current Relationship with Uzbekistan Has Costs to the U.S.

- The loss of Karsi-Khanabad has made the U.S. more dependent upon a weak and at best incompetent regime in Kyrgyzstan

- The U.S. regional economic initiatives are made more difficult to successfully execute without Uzbek participation. At minimum this will severely slow Tajik economic development, as well as Afghan economic recovery, and could imperil state survival in each country, as those alternative transports routes that bypass Russia, also bypass Uzbekistan must go over much more inhospitable high mountain terrain in Tajikistan and Afghanistan both.

- It is also strengthening Chinese economic influence (as transport options through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to China are increasing) vis a vis that of India, which is still substantially disadvantaged by current transport schemes, and less committed to trade with either Afghanistan or Central Asia than is China.

- It has become harder for the U.S. to directly engage with the next generation of Uzbeks, as it is much more difficult for them to get travel and study opportunities in the U.S.

- While an oftentimes embarrassing ally on the struggle against international terrorism, Karimov was an occasionally useful ally, especially, in the early years of improved U.S.-Uzbek relations, on questions relating to Israel. As the situation in the Middle East grows more complicated, it will become more important for the U.S. to find independent

channels to the various post-Soviet states that are not wholly shaped by Russia, a role which Uzbekistan not infrequently played.

Conclusion

Obviously, none of this is argument for the U.S. to reverse the thrust of post-Andijian policy towards Uzbekistan, a policy which already had strong support in Congress due to Uzbekistan's highly dubious human rights record even before that event.

But Karimov has found ways to minimize the damage to him personally, to his family, and to his regime that resulted from U.S. and European efforts at isolation. He has even found new investors, largely from Russia and China, eager to invest in the larger energy projects that western investors were never able to conclude to their satisfaction.

Eventually Karimov will leave office, even if he runs in 2007, old-age and ill-health will eventually overtake him. But the U.S. faces an enormous challenge in Uzbekistan until he does—and there is a political situation on the ground that creates the opportunity for greater political openness—which Karimov's handoff of power to a hand-picked successor need not necessarily produce.

The U.S. must find ways to engage the Uzbek population, through a variety of educational and media-based outreaches. Much of the media work can be done without re-engagement with the Uzbek government. And maybe some of the education work can be done through non-U.S. partners. But unless someone works with the Uzbeks to get improvements in basic primary and secondary education, science and math in curriculum, teachers salaries, and physical plant, especially in rural areas, the U.S. may succeed in helping to develop a narrow band of secular western-trained potential elites, largely trained abroad, but they will be wholly alien from the society they seek to govern.



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