Uzbekistan: A Strategic Challenge to American Policy

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Introduction

Uzbekistan is America's most important ally in Central Asia. Indeed, Jane's Intelligence Digest reported in April 2004 that U.S. authorities were considering converting an existing U.S. base in Uzbekistan into more permanent or at least longer-term facilities. In March 2004, when Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited the country, Uzbek Foreign Minister Sadiq Safayev stated that he did "not rule out the possibility that the U.S. military base would be allowed to stay on in Uzbekistan on a permanent basis." And while it is unclear whether Washington wants permanent bases there, apparently the United States does seek permanent access to military facilities if needed.[1] At the same time, the United States and its Asian partners and allies, including India and (according to Jane's) Uzbekistan, have discussed a possible Asian NATO.[2]

> This "Asian NATO" would be built upon the new U.S. strategy of moving from Cold War–style large permanent bases (a feature of Western Europe) to "operating sites" (the aim of future NATO bases in new NATO members in Eastern Europe). These smaller bases would provide access and support for mobile forces to deal with exigencies when, and if, they arise, rather than tie down large numbers of troops.[3]

These discussions, if they did or are occurring, indicate the scope of American interests in Uzbekistan in particular and in Central Asia in general. Based on repeated statements by high-ranking officials to Congress and in other public statements, those interests seem to comprise the following goals, as stated in June 2004 by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Lorne Cramer:

> The primary strategic goal of the United States in Central Asia is to see the development of independent, democratic, and stable states, committed to the kind of political and economic reform that is essential to modern societies and on the path to integration and to the world economy. The strategy that we follow is based on simultaneous pursuit of three related goals. The first of these goals is security. Our counterterrorism cooperation bolsters the sovereignty and independence of these states and provides them with the stability needed to undertake the reforms that are in their long-term interest. However, in order for these nations to be truly stable over the long term and to be fully integrated into the international community, to achieve their potential, they must allow for greater transparency, respect for human rights, and movement toward democratic policy. Finally, the development of Central Asia's economic potential, including its extensive natural resources, requires free market economy reforms and foreign direct investment. This is the only way to improve the well-being of the region's people, diversify world energy sources, and facilitate the movement of these countries into the world economy.[4]

These goals are conceived as benefitting all external governments with major interests in Central Asia, like Russia and China, even as Washington pursues a policy that opposes all monopolies whether in economics or security. While Russia and China may see our presence there as inherently threatening to their vital interests, the United States views this kind of zero-sum, “spheres of influence” approach as, to quote Cramer, a "mug's game."[5] American officials are concerned about the possibility of Central Asia serving as a transit zone for weapons of mass destruction or for the technologies and know-how that go toward making them.[6] Central Asia is also of growing importance to American interests for reasons not directly concerned with the global war on terrorism. Apart from its logistical significance in the war on terrorism, Central Asia is important to American interests because of its proximity to Russia, Iran, China and because of its energy deposits. On his tour of the region in April 2004, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage stated that America regards Central Asia as "a linchpin in global peace and prosperity. And so stability in the area is of paramount importance and vital national interest" to the United States.[7]

But Uzbekistan is also potentially America’s most problematic ally in the region; numerous indicators suggest a major crisis that could threaten the Uzbek regime’s stability may already be developing. The many problems connected with Uzbekistan’s domestic governance could undermine the United States’ position there and across Central Asia with surprising rapidity. Once again the United States could be caught by surprise supporting a Muslim state whose ruler falls due to major economic and political failures, making us a target of intense local opposition. Several reports already cite evidence showing that important sectors of public opinion, either in Uzbekistan or in Central Asia, see the United States as turning its back on reform to align itself with a repressive, corrupt, and backward regime that either cannot or will not provide for Uzbekistan's progress.[8]

Whether or not state failure and collapse is inevitable cannot be definitively determined from outside at this moment. What can be stated is that too many of the pathologies and warning signs associated with the irrevocable degeneration of a state are discernible. The risks that might

accrue to the U.S. position in Central Asia cannot be dismissed. Moreover, the signs of Uzbek state failure denote a process that would make Uzbekistan part of the problem that U.S. and Central Asian reformers face in Central Asia, not part of the solution. In that case Uzbekistan would become a source of threat to all of Central Asia, including Afghanistan. This is not merely the author's view.[9] Other analysts see Central Asia's future in Central Africa's past, identifying the source of state failure in the effort to combine neo-Soviet forms of institutional and political control with "big man" governance. They regard state failure throughout the region—including in Uzbekistan, which epitomizes this form of rule and enjoys the strongest neo-Soviet mechanisms of power—as being all but inevitable.[10]

That outcome would have critical repercussions for the war on terrorism, U.S. policy in Afghanistan and in Central Asia, and the United States' already precarious standing in the Islamic world. Not the least of such possible outcomes could be the takeover of a major Central Asian state by factions inclined toward terrorism and hostile to American interests and values. Long-term violence and instability in a key Central Asian state could also emerge out of a collapse of the status quo in Uzbekistan. That denouement would not only destabilize all of Central Asia, it would also represent a major victory for Al-Qaeda and for associated terrorist groups. U.S. officials understand the connection between repressive societies, lack of economic development, and the ensuing attraction to terrorism. For some time they have explicitly linked those failures in domestic governance to security and access to energy. As Assistant Secretary of State A. Elizabeth Jones said in 2001,

> The terrorist threat emanating from Afghanistan reinforces our view that underdevelopment and repressive, anti-democratic regimes provide certain conditions that terrorists and other extremists exploit --- **d**evelopment of the vast Caspian energy reserves and their reliable export to global markets will in large part determine the ability of Central Asia to achieve economic independence and improve the standard of living of its citizens.[11]

Arguably, Uzbekistan's pattern of domestic governance could already be eroding its value and availability as a strategic partner, if not ally, of the United States, as well as the

stability of the entire region. Yet the dilemma of successfully inducing a recalcitrant ally to reform without sacrificing thereby American strategic interests is a long-standing problem in American diplomacy dating back to the Cold War. Nor is it clear that U.S. policy is able or willing to make the necessary tradeoffs between its competing priorities of war and democratization in severely authoritarian regimes like Uzbekistan.[12] American history suggests that this dilemma has often proved intractable for policymakers, for example, in the Shah's Iran and in South Vietnam. In both cases the stability of these regimes as Cold-War allies inhibited our ability to push or cajole them into making reforms.

As long as the global war on terrorism continues, it is unlikely that U.S. policy toward Uzbekistan and Central Asia will move from emphasizing security and stability, defined as support for existing regimes, to the priority of democratic reform. The fact that Central Asia is now the center of an international competition or "New Great Game" involving Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Tehran, Delhi, Brussels, and Islamabad, not to mention local actors (both state and nonstate), only makes it harder to focus U.S. policy on democratization. Accordingly this essay examines the dimensions of this challenge and suggests policies that might help to avert the possibility of crisis in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan as American Partner or Ally

Uzbekistan brings many positive assets to its relationship with the United States. It possesses the largest population and army in Central Asia, shares no borders with China or Russia, has a direct border with Afghanistan, is self-sufficient in energy, has rich mineral reserves, and possesses the basis for a diversified rather than mono-crop economy. Uzbekistan features other developmental assets like a growing population, high levels of literacy, a relatively well-educated elite, and a well-developed communications infrastructure. The conditions at the U.S. air base in Karshi Khanabad are among the best in the area for establishing and maintaining a functioning air base (such as weather, runway capabilities, and the ability to devise a satisfactory Status of Forces Agreement). Uzbekistan can pursue a highly independent foreign policy and stand as a desirable

ally for the major players in Central Asia (the United States, Russia, and China). As Cramer testified,

> Central Asia has major strategic importance for the United States, and Uzbekistan inevitably plays a key role in our policy toward the region. It occupies, as we know, a core position in Central Asia. It has, by far, the largest population, and it is the guardian of a centuries-long tradition of enlightened Islamic scholarship and culture. And it boasts the largest and most effective military among the five countries **[of Central Asia]**.[13]

Uzbek analysts share an exalted view of their country's strategic potential and clearly want the United States to, in effect, deputize it as its most favored regional ally in Central Asia. Political scientist Farkhod Tolipov writes,

> Uzbekistan can be perceived as a pillar of Central Asia and of its geopolitical stability. If Uzbekistan falls so will the whole **[of?]** Central Asia. Twenty-five million people reside in this country, which is half of [the approximately] 50 million Central Asian population.[14]

Other analysts suggest that should violence break out anywhere in Central Asia, it would likely spread throughout the region, bringing in other adjoining areas.[15] Certainly that includes upheaval in Uzbekistan. Not surprisingly the other adjacent major powers, Russia and China, have spent considerable energy and resources to woo Uzbekistan and persuade it to adopt their views of Central Asia's security agenda. China is placing increasing economic resources on the table for Uzbekistan as well as committing to defend local governments against terrorist and separatist threats. This commitment is embodied in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) 2001 charter and in the joint exercises China conducted with all SCO member countries in 2003 and 2004, as well as its bilateral exercises with the Kyrgyz military. China's leadership is clearly pressing for a major expansion of all forms of Sino-Uzbek cooperation.[16] And Russia's efforts under Vladimir Putin to "reintegrate" Central Asia with Russia on a basis of diminished independence in both economics and defense are well known. The Russian and Chinese governments signed partnership agreements with Uzbekistan on the same day, June 15, 2004.[17]

All three governments believe that insofar as Central Asia is concerned, strong ties to Uzbekistan are important, possibly in the same way that Egypt was important during the Cold

War. They compete intensely among themselves for advantage and leverage in Central Asia, thereby fostering a kind of regional bipolarity or tripolarity. This situation imparts to the competition much of the quality of a zero-sum game and evokes the "Great Game" in its use of both economic and military instruments of power. The consequences are significant for the regional actors, not least Uzbekistan. Its commitment to a foreign policy that maximizes its independence is greatly enhanced by this rivalry and thus presents a formidable obstacle to any effort by these powers to establish a viable or enduring hegemony or lasting status as Central Asia's security manager.

Recognizing Uzbekistan's strategic potential President Islam Karimov regularly asserts his independence and plays off Russia, China, and the United States against each other. Karimov turns to one of these governments whenever the demands made by any of the others exceeds his definition of the proper scope of their relationship to Uzbekistan.[18] When American pressure for democracy becomes too great or too annoying, he turns to China and Russia, neither of which are interested in exporting democracy or care about Uzbekistan's human rights policies. Russian reports state that Karimov's turn to Russia in 2004, culminating in a strategic agreement with Moscow that even allows for Russian military installations in Uzbekistan, was inaugurated by him, not Moscow, clearly in response to U.S. pressures.[19]

Since Uzbekistan felt itself before 2001 to be a "front-line state" threatened by terror emanating from Afghanistan and backed by Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and behind them Pakistan (a standpoint then shared by U.S. Central Command [CENTCOM]), and has been consistently wary of Russo-Chinese aims in Central Asia, it was the first state to offer its territory to Washington in the war against Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. This offer displayed Uzbekistan's belief that Washington's retaliation would protect it against terrorist threats and counter Moscow's efforts to constrict Central Asian governments' foreign and defense policy independence. Karimov's stance compelled Russian president Putin to support Washington and created the basis for the current regional status quo.[20] Karimov's decisions grew out of his prior relationship with the U.S. military, in exchanges that CENTCOM had forged with Uzbekistan

and its armed forces under Gen. Anthony Zinni (USMC Ret.) and Gen. Tommy Franks (USA Ret.) since the late 1990s. This relationship built mutual confidence and trust, and provided the basis for the offer of a U.S. air base at Karshi Khanabad.[21]

In return the United States has provided significant military and other assistance to Uzbekistan, and signed an accord with it on March 12, 2002.[22] Although this agreement did not give Uzbekistan the ironclad security guarantee it sought, it obligated the United States to take any threats to its security seriously, committed Uzbekistan to a comprehensive program of economic and political reform, and laid the basis for increased economic and military assistance to Uzbekistan.[23] This treaty and the willingness to entertain a permanent American military presence demonstrates Karimov's hope that Washington will replace Moscow as the regional security manager and that his status as America's favorite partner will be commensurately enhanced. On the other hand it is by no means certain that Washington wants to be tied down to Karimov's agenda, which would embroil it with every other state in the region given Uzbekistan's excessively assertive policies towards its neighbors.[24]

Uzbekistan's Liabilities

Despite its considerable assets Uzbekistan's policies have generated significant obstacles, both potential and actual, to fully realizing its partnership with the United States and becoming a stable, democratizing, and developing country that could act as a magnet to other, neighboring states, and to fulfilling its own security goals. These liabilities exist in both its external and domestic policies. First of all, in the past Karimov has not tried to hide his ambition of making Uzbekistan a regional hegemon. He has earned the constant suspicion of all of his Central Asian neighbors, not to mention Russia and China. Iran also distrusts Karimov because of his rapprochements with Washington and Jerusalem.

Many Uzbek policies have reinforced local governments' perception of the threat of Uzbek hegemony or of hegemony supported by Washington. Uzbekistan has mined its borders, allegedly to prevent terrorists from crossing over. Although it was prevailed upon to begin de-

mining, the country recently stopped doing so, probably due to a rising sense of terrorist threat and unauthorized trade across the border with Kyrgyzstan.[25] Uzbekistan has also launched land grabs against Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan and is regarded with great suspicion by all three states.[26] Tajik authorities claim that Uzbekistan is waging an undeclared railway war against its citizens by requiring transit visas for Tajik citizens en route through Uzbekistan.[27] Tashkent was implicated, and admitted as much, in a coup against President Sapirmurad Niyazov of Turkmenistan in 2002, and evidently supported a 1998 coup attempt in Tajikistan. Its ostentatious support for U.S. troops leads some regional observers to fear that it might serve as a potential vanguard for an American effort to dominate Central Asia.[28] Yet these potential liabilities in a partnership with the United States pale before the real threats that stem from Karimov's rule, a form of governance that Prof. Max Manwaring of the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute described as "illegitimate governance."[29]

Illegitimate Governance, Uzbek-Style

Uzbekistan's domestic record on democracy and liberalizing reform is abysmal. Civil liberties have been suppressed consistently and with considerable brutality. Although it is not alone in employing torture against prisoners, numerous reports suggest that this is (or at least was) done systematically even to nonpolitical prisoners despite a growing Western outcry.[30] This suppression applies to religious and political dissent, with virtually all opponents of the regime being indiscriminately accused (and sentenced) for terrorism or various sexual perversions.[31]

Many, if not all, of the symptoms of dictatorial misrule are present here. Cronyism and statist mismanagement of the economy have led to a withering of foreign investment, threats of sanctions from international financial institutions (IFIs) like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development for failure to institute economic and political reforms, stagnating growth, increased economic stratification, and visible signs of poverty and despair.[32] The Institute for War and Peace Reporting found widespread child labor in the harvesting of

cotton, Uzbekistan's main crop.[33] Uzbekistan apparently still fails to meet even minimal standards in the fight against human trafficking.[34]

Another typical sign of illegitimate governance is the growing economic crisis due to immiseration of much of the population and widespread corruption of the regime. According to the International Monetary Fund, the Uzbek economy grew only 0.3% in 2003, and per capita income has fallen every year since 1998, to $350 in 2003. In 2004 the State Department warned that per capita income might fall to $250 if draconian regulations and currency controls were not lifted.[35] These economic conditions fuel mass despair, suicides, and uprisings or violence, sure signs of an anomic society. This trend, as Uzbek officials know, could provide fuel for a rash of suicide bombers.[36] Typifying this mélange of cronyism, arbitrary despotism, and corruption, Karimov's daughter Gulnara Karimova, her relatives, and family cronies enjoy a disproportionate role in the Uzbek economy, and she is widely reported to be involved with criminal enterprises, including trafficking in women.[37]

Meanwhile Uzbekistan’s police are both brutal and thoroughly corrupt. Consequently they have earned not just the fear but also the contempt of the majority of citizens, many of whose conditions are so desperate that they no longer fear to show how disenchanted they are. This is true even if one argues, as do some observers, that there have been some discernible, if minor, improvements in the human rights situation since 2002.[38] During episodes of political violence earlier this year, the population as a whole was notably indifferent to the regime, a clear warning sign that it would probably not defend the regime against a coup.[39] As many of those attacks were targeted against the police, they exploited the latter’s incapacity and corruption, as well as public antagonism towards them.[40]

Anti-regime violence broke out in March-April, August, and November 2004, and the opposition parties boycotted the December 2004 parliamentary election on the grounds that it was not democratic. The vaunted legislative restructuring that is supposed to make way for the formation of multiple political parties will likely lead nowhere. Nor will it alleviate the gloom that now pervades Uzbek sociopolitical life.[41] If anything, more political repression is likely,

based on Karimov's reaction to the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003 and to Ukraine's revolution of 2004, in which he supported Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, the standard-bearer of anti-reform forces in Ukraine, and dismissed both revolutions as “stage-managed."[42] Nevertheless holding sham elections with a sham but formally elected legislature could, in the future, develop into a trap for the regime. This is what happened to Russia in March 1917.

These events and trends denote a deep potential for coups led by a minority faction, possibly terrorists or radicals espousing some version of Islamic fundamentalism; successful terrorist-led insurgencies; mass uprisings that bring down the entire system at a time of its weakness; or periodic outbreaks of localized violence that could gradually immobilize the regime over time. The potential for unrest in Uzbekistan thoroughly alarms other Central Asian governments, who worry about the spread of violence into their countries if Karimov's regime falls. For instance, Vladimir Bozhko, first deputy director of Kazakhstan's National Security Committee, publicly warned that as long as Uzbekistan’s and Afghanistan's populations remain economically depressed and the local situation in those countries remains politically volatile, Kazakhstan will be at risk from terrorist attacks. Moreover he and other Kazakh authorities have caught Uzbeks engaged in terrorism within Kazakhstan, a pattern repeated as well in Kyrgyzstan.[43] Their anxiety should trigger our concern, as Ahmed Rashid writes:

> The closing down of Uzbekistan is more than a threat to the country's own population. It also represents a growing danger to all Central Asian nations. The arbitrary behavior of Karimov's administration is increasingly seen as a destabilizing factor for the entire region.[44]

Paradoxically, Uzbekistan may be becoming an exporter rather than an importer of Islamic extremism. This would be a reversal of the recent pattern whereby Taliban-era Afghanistan, with help from Bin Laden and Pakistan's Inter-Services Institution, exported instability throughout the world and Central Asia in particular.[45] If this trend continues, the destabilization of Uzbekistan could, as Tolipov warns, become a catalyst for the spread of similar trends and forces to other Central Asian countries and back to Afghanistan, thus undermining, if not undoing, what has been accomplished there since 2001. This pattern

underscores the dangers of Karimov's continued governance in Uzbekistan and its region-wide consequences. Neither do the pathologies of this regime end there.

Karimov is reported to be suffering from a slow-acting but terminal illness, possibly a form of leukemia. His daughter has already been sent to Moscow as the number two member of the embassy and obtained her living permit (*Propiska*) there.

The support of dictators like Karimov—who can thereby be easily compromised and rendered dependent upon Moscow for their continuation in power—has become a hallmark of Russian policy throughout the CIS and even Eastern Europe.[46] One analyst likens Gulnara Karimova's presence in Moscow to the medieval Russian practice of compelling the heirs and princes of subjected peoples to stay at the Russian court in Moscow as a kind of hostage of their parents' good behavior.[47] The achievement of a pliable Uzbek regime would be a major victory for Russian foreign policy in Central Asia and beyond. And it would be interpreted as an American defeat, underscoring the fact that great-power activities in the CIS are perceived internationally as a zero-sum game. Putin has stated his opposition to exporting democracy to other CIS governments and his belief that U.S. military presence is a temporary one for the duration of the war on terrorism. A victory in Uzbekistan that reduces or even ousts the U.S. military presence there would play well in Moscow, where the government increasingly believes that it is under siege in the CIS from the West and especially the United States.[48] As one hallmark of Putin’s regime has been the ever more systematic use of his country’s instruments of power to render Central Asia dependent upon Russia, we can expect this policy to continue vis-à-vis Uzbekistan.

Russia's democratic deformities lead its rulers to espouse policies that exploit and perpetuate the pathologies common to Central Asian regimes in order to turn them to the benefit of the Russian state or its component elites.[49] In turn, Central Asian rulers, and not just Karimov, look to Russia for support against pressures for reform.[50] In the recent past Karimov has turned increasingly to Moscow, not least because of Western pressures to reform.[51] The same holds true for China, which clearly opposes reform in Central Asia lest it energize domestic

opposition in Xinjiang. If anything, it is cooperating with Uzbekistan to gain influence there as Tashkent tires of American remonstrations about human rights, and the quid pro quo of this deal is enhanced persecution of Uighurs in Uzbekistan.[52]

These trends betoken a tough succession struggle inasmuch as succession, as in many other such regimes, is one of the key weaknesses of the Uzbek state system. Since Uzbek politics are in many respects clan and factional politics with little or no concern for national interest, Karimov must constantly balance between these groups to maximize his own leverage and even to staff the regime, especially as the succession issue grows more acute.[53] As one recent account suggests, the domestic political landscape is extremely complex.

> The Uzbek elite, for example, comprises at least three separate groups: Westernizing liberals dominant in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and parts of the Ministry of Defense; former communists with a power base in the security services; and a nationalist-religious faction, which by no means is close to Islamic radicalism, but nevertheless sees an important role for Islam in the future of the Uzbek state.[54]

External observers also warn that Karimov may be trying to create a new clan drawn from existing sources of power but which is based primarily, if not exclusively, on loyalty to him.[55]

According to Indian scholar Anita Sengupta, a diplomat who is also a researcher on Central Asia said that the post-Soviet political shape of Central Asia is being molded against the backdrop of clannism, perhaps the most important aspect of regional political life.[56] This hardly augurs well for democracy, though it does facilitate conspiratorial and corrupt structures of rule that play into Moscow's hands. Since Russian policy systematically forms alliances among its own secret police, businesses, organized crime figures, and local politicians who can be easily compromised, a factional struggle for succession will likely involve pro-Moscow and Russian factions' fighting for power in Uzbekistan. Still more certain is that the "fragility of the system is reflected in clan rivalries over Karimov's successor," as one Uzbek official told Prof. Kathleen Collins of Notre Dame. "If something happens to Karimov, there is not a mechanism for a transfer of power; there could be an interclan war."[57]

Any succession struggle will therefore be a multilateral one with significant foreign policy and internal repercussions, and could easily further undermine the already tenuous legitimacy of the state and of U.S. military presence. The excessive involvement of foreign states in the domestic politics of Asian and African states in the Third World has often aggravated domestic and foreign security problems confronting these states, and such an outcome in Uzbekistan would probably be no different.[58] More specifically, a pro-Russian but no less despotic, though more anti-American, regime could come to power and erode the U.S. presence in Uzbekistan. While even the Uzbek factions that favor greater integration with Russia may be more self-seeking than pro-Russian, their dependence on Moscow's support could leave them more vulnerable to future Russian pressures opposed to democratization and pro-Western policies.

The absence of any sense of a national interest and the widespread corruption and civic demoralization that have occurred impart little viability to the ersatz and authoritarian Uzbek nationalist ideology that Karimov has tried to foster through a cult of personality and of Tamerlane.[59] There is little reason to believe that there is a deep-rooted loyalty to the state or a truly cohesive sense of an Uzbek nation, as opposed to a state.

U.S. Policy

Close examination of American policy toward Uzbekistan reveals numerous unresolved contradictions and challenges, some of which are structural and afflict policymaking in general while others apply only to Uzbekistan. Moreover, increasingly visible structural faults in the institutions responsible for planning U.S. strategy and policy impede the formulation and implementation of a coherent national security strategy. Some prominent former policymakers disdain the very idea of a strategic approach to world affairs.[60]

General Zinni has written:

> The Washington bureaucracy was too disjointed to make the vision of all the strategies, from the President's to the CINCs' (Commander in Chiefs of major U.S. commands like CENTCOM) a reality. There was no single authority in the bureaucracy to coordinate the

> significant programs we CINCs designed. The uncoordinated funding, policy decisions, authority, assigned geography, and many other issues separated State, Defense, Congress, the National Security Council, and other government agencies and made it difficult to pull complex engagement plans together… The result is a constant friction between the CINCs and Washington. To further complicate matters, the CINCs don't control their own resources. Their budgets come out of the service budgets, and these are controlled by the Service Chiefs (who are also double-hatted as the Joint Chiefs), who understandably don't want to give up their resources to the CINCs. The Service Chiefs have minimal interest in, and little insight into, engagement programs. They're trying to run their services, and that job's hard enough without other burdens. Their purpose and function is to train, organize, and equip forces for the CINCs, but what they actually want to do is provide these forces where, when, and how they see best. In other words, CINCs are demanding forces and resources for purposes that the Service Chiefs may not support. Thus the CINC is an impediment—and even a threat—and the rising power of the CINCs reduces the powers of the Service Chiefs. It's a zero-sum game. Looking at the problem from the other side, the CINCs see the Service Chiefs as standing in the way of what they desperately need; and they are frustrated by the chiefs' inability to fully cooperate with them or support their strategies. The CINCs want to see their money identified and set aside in a specific budget line, so they know what they have. For all kinds of reasons, the Department of Defense is reluctant to do this. The result is a constant friction between the CINCs and Washington.[61]

Zinni describes a policy process that is long on policymaking through competing "stovepipes" but short on interagency coordination. Zinni describes one situation in which he had immense difficulty getting strategic guidance from his superiors:

> I never got any policy direction. I read the National Security Strategy and National Military Strategy; they're Pollyannaish—something for everyone. I couldn't discern priorities…. The interagency process is 'ad-hocery' at its best, as decisionmakers try to figure out where on a map an issue is. There's no depth of understanding like those out living the issues.[62]

It is unlikely that U.S. policy toward Uzbekistan has escaped these pervasive structural problems and their attendant costs.

For every proposed alternative to the current system, there is a good argument that whatever line of structural and policy reform we take imposes costs and forecloses other options. Nevertheless, the problems cited here create a situation where policy emerges in an ad-hoc, disjointed, incremental, uncoordinated manner. The U.S. Commission on National Security, also known as the Hart-Rudman Commission, observed that every regional combatant commander

> does have a Political Advisor from the State Department, but there is no systematic civilian foreign policy input into military planning. When a crisis occurs, coordinating the various civilian activities (humanitarian assistance and police forces) with military activities (transport or peacekeeping operations) remains very uneven. More fundamentally, a gap exists between [the commander] who operates on a regional basis, and the Ambassador, who is responsible for activities within only one country.[63]

Many U.S. policymakers cite a lack of coordination among the various departments funneling money into foreign countries and even a lack of knowledge by one arm of the government of the other's activities.[64] Policy is anything but joint, and coordination of funding key agencies' programs is often not part of a strategic plan for either a country or region.[65]

U.S. policy toward Uzbekistan clearly does not escape these dilemmas. The lack of coordination leads to clashing priorities in funds earmarked for Uzbekistan. For instance, U.S. policymakers concur that winning the war on terrorism and ensuring regional security in Central Asia are our priority. Thus military assistance to the Uzbek regime quite properly has as its first priority strengthening military and government capabilities. There is at least some analytical support for the idea of intervening in at-risk states to uphold their capability to provide security.[66] Military leaders like Zinni argue that Uzbekistan and its neighbors are “front-line states” menaced by the terrorist threat and thus deserve our support. The priority should be to view them in this light and support them despite their domestic policies.[67] Yet while State Department and Defense Department officials, and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff including Chief of Staff Gen. Richard Myers, embrace this approach, State Department spokesmen, who must also respond to public and legislative pressures (if not laws) are more sensitive to the need to pressure Uzbek leaders on the entire range of questions pertaining to human rights and liberalization, if not democratization. They are more attuned to the need for funding programs on a basis of conditionality, which entails progress toward economic and political liberalization. While Uzbek officials and diplomats seek foreign investments, Assistant Secretary of State Jones stated "no money goes to the government of Uzbekistan" but rather it goes to nongovernmental organizations working to further liberal programs.[68]

In public statements, these State Department officials reveal not just the inherent tension in their position, but also that they have striven to carry out the contradictory demands of U.S. policy by emphasizing security while simultaneously pressuring Uzbek leaders to implement reforms.[69] Expert analyses confirm that American diplomats have consistently reminded their Uzbek interlocutors of the need to institute reforms in the economy, polity, and legal systems. To some (albeit a disappointing) extent, they have had some successes in improving the status quo.[70]

But because of this institutional contradiction, State Department officials were obliged by law to cut off some military aid programs (which ironically went to the more Western-oriented Uzbek Army). Shortly thereafter General Myers went to Uzbekistan and increased weapons transfers and military assistance, allegedly in part because of concerns that Karimov was gravitating too much to Moscow. He indicated that the cutoffs were not in America's best interest, "shortsighted", and "not productive", hardly a signal that we follow a coordinated policy or that Tashkent must take human rights seriously.[71] This episode exemplifies the gains that accrue to Karimov from his flexibility. While the threat posed by terrorists is real and even growing, such uncoordinated actions bespeak the absence of a clear strategy in Washington towards Uzbekistan and a lack of interagency policy coordination; they suggest that it is hopeless to expect Karimov to institute reforms. Several accounts of U.S. policy in the region charge that a truly strategic or consistent approach to Central Asia is lacking, and policy remains instrumental at best and insufficiently focused on the nonmilitary dimensions of security.[72]

These contradictions allegedly encourage Uzbek officials to discount the U.S. on matters of democratic reforms, in the belief that we are not serious.[73] As a result, Uzbekistan receives aid while our leverage over its domestic policies remains limited and domestic conditions steadily worsen. This increases the tendency to view such aid as payment for access, not as a sign of a genuine commitment.[74] The defect in our policy is not the priority assigned to Uzbekistan’s importance in the war on terrorism, which makes strategic sense, but rather the absence of an approach that sees the larger trends and future development of Central Asia in a

genuinely strategic perspective and that acts to coordinates all aspects of policy including, crucially, the disbursement of funds. This lack of coordination allows the fundamental question to go unanswered: Can Uzbekistan, with its current government, serve as a reliable and beneficial strategic partner for the United States beyond the immediate term? Even as policymakers grasp that things are not well in Uzbekistan, the absence of coordination prevents a comprehensive review of our assistance programs, their utility, and the extent to which they truly serve our overarching strategic and regional interests.

This situation is all too reminiscent of the Cold War. In wartime or at least a facsimile of regional bipolarity between the United States and terrorists, or in regional rivalry between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing, Uzbekistan has much room for pocketing aid and then going its own way. Studies of both American and Soviet military assistance reveal little success in getting recipients to follow donors' interests and preferences, or in achieving a convergence of interests and values among donors and recipients.[75] A recent study on Africa concludes:

> To the extent that donors actually prefer to promote democracy among recipient countries, threats to make aid conditional on the fulfillment of democratic reforms may not be credible, because withholding aid from autocratic countries could mean losing clients to the other Cold War power. In other words, the geostrategic cost of losing clients may override any perceived benefit from successfully promoting democratic reforms among recipient countries.[77]

There is little we can do about this issue at present. Even though some argue that Uzbekistan is more susceptible to our pressure than it wants to admit, research on Cold War security cooperation suggests that the ability to induce positive democratic reforms in a state that receives substantial U.S. aid diminishes in conditions of strategic bipolarity. Thus the question arises as to whether U.S. policy against terrorism is being held hostage in Uzbekistan. As Eugene Rumer writes, "As seen from Tashkent, the U.S. is beholden to Uzbekistan as an indispensable ally, and for as long as the U.S. maintains a military presence there, warnings about reform can be ignored."[78]

While conditions within contemporary world politics may frustrate American efforts to induce Uzbek reforms, there is little doubt that global structural factors are aggravated by the

absence of interagency and policy coordination in Washington. The difference between State Department and Defense Department policy emphases owes much to their inherent functional differentiation, but there is no a priori reason why greater coordination cannot be realized. Unless that happens, Uzbek officials who oppose domestic reforms can continually exploit the gaps in these two departments' outlooks to preserve the status quo. Similarly they will be able to disregard the chorus of disapproval from European governments, and to some extent from IFIs, concerning Uzbekistan's domestic and economic policies. In doing so they may be undermining the interests of Uzbekistan's most visible ally and hastening their own (violent) demise.

These defects also prevent us from addressing the roots of crisis in Uzbekistan and from understanding the range of internal developments that could contribute to the success or failure of our policies. We have seen too many examples of what happens when the national security bureaucracy and policy process cannot be coordinated in time to prevent crises from occurring or to confront them with a real strategy.

Threats to Uzbekistan's Security

American policymakers may not have the luxury of taking a leisurely approach to coordinating policies toward Uzbekistan. There are too many signs of rising threat beyond reports of Karimov's illness and the inherent weakness connected with the issue of succession.[79] Nor is the region as a whole immune to threats arising from social crises. As Ahmed Rashid recently wrote,

> Apart from Kazakhstan—which has substantial oil revenues and has allowed a controlled system of multi-party democracy—in varying degrees all the Central Asian Republics are experiencing increasing poverty, lack of political and economic reforms, and a continuation of rule by the same oligarchies that have been in power since the Soviet era. The lack of middle-of-the-road political parties or democracy means that opposition to these regimes is increasingly taking the shape of adherence to underground radical Islamic groups. The fact that some 60 percent of the population is under 25 and the majority is jobless could result in social and economic explosions in several countries that lack democratic alternatives. The Islamist extremists would be in a position to benefit if this should occur. All the Central Asian authoritarian leaders have felt threatened by the sudden explosion of democracy in Afghanistan.[80]

Other signs suggest a rising tide that could, in tandem with a succession crisis, generate an upheaval in Uzbekistan that would quickly spread beyond its borders. One recent report observes:

> That the preponderance of extremist forces are allied against Karimov evokes, from the U.S. perspective, memories of pre-1979 Iran; we are in the uncomfortably familiar situation of having our principal military ally in a Muslim region being a corrupt, secular, authoritarian opposed by Islamic fundamentalist forces.[81]

Karimov's penchant for arresting anyone who expresses independent religious or political views has essentially converted official Islam into a colorless tool of the state that lacks effective spokesmen. Evidence indicates that the official clergy cannot even begin to deal with opposition religious arguments.[82] Although some observers cite the general political quietism and subservience to the state of Central Asian religion in the past, these clergymen may well be losing the ability to credibly represent Islam to their constituents and thus their legitimacy as authority figures.[83] This opens the field to challengers of the regime who can cloak their violent radicalism in religious rhetoric, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a fundamentalist Islamist group that claims to espouse nonviolence but in fact advocates violence and the restoration of the caliphate. Hizb-ut-Tahrir is wedded to a Leninist, conspiratorial organizational model that expresses violent rhetorical opposition to Karimov and virulent anti-Semitic and anti-Western propaganda.[84]

There are also numerous Uzbeks working with or in Al-Qaeda, probably in Pakistan or along the frontier with Afghanistan. Signs indicate a revival of the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan (IMU), an opposition group that was thought to be destroyed in the American attacks on Afghanistan in 2001–2002.[85] Many reports cite renewed terrorist activity among Uzbek diasporas in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.[86] Moreover, and keeping in mind that local crises are regionally interrelated, there is major reason to worry about Turkmenistan, and even president Askar Akayev of Kyrgyzstan has expressed fears of a worsening situation in his country.[87]

Opposition to and innocent victims of the regime are routinely described as belonging to one or more of the above organizations. But independent observers confirm the revival of the

IMU, the presence of Uzbeks in Al-Qaeda's entourage, and the presence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in and around Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan has also been the Central Asian state most targeted by terrorist violence dating back to 1999, and there have been at least three major episodes of such violence in 2004 alone. One of the most troubling manifestations of these eruptions is that there no longer appears to be either public fear of the regime or any sign of public support for it. This lack of support, along with the police's incompetence and venality, renders the regime vulnerable to armed coups or mass uprisings, especially in a moment of vulnerability such as a succession struggle.

Coups could even come about through the alignment of one or more opposition factions with other such groups, or with one of the rivals for succession. At the same time, Karimov's response to such threats is to criticize his neighbors and international security agencies for failing to stop terrorist infiltration and to label all opposition as belonging to Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the IMU, or Al-Qaeda.[88]

It appears that the threat to stability in Uzbekistan resides not in a terrorist takeover, but rather in the danger of a failed state. State failure is often a drawn-out process, much of which is hidden from external observers or even from the regime, as its governance capabilities gradually, unobtrusively, but steadily "hollow out." In Uzbekistan's case a succession crisis could be the public detonator for an already developing process in which popular support, the economy, the state's monopoly over violence, and effective ability to govern society all decline. A succession crisis provides outlets, even if they are largely symbolic, for political competition in the Parliament that could become public platforms for factionalized competition between or among rival clans. Coupled with the strength of the executive in Uzbekistan—which has a winner-take-all character in terms of the power at its disposal—opportunities for factionalized competition could be the spark that ignites state failure.[89] Should the Uzbek state disintegrate, the process or processes generated thereby could then open the way to a terrorist or radical Islamist regime, or to attempted takeovers by such forces that would probably generate a protracted insurgency in the area and make it difficult, if not impossible, for the U.S. base there to function securely.

It is unlikely that regime collapse, should it occur, will immediately lead to a terrorist takeover. Rather, that failure will enable forces to coalesce or to join with other contenders for power and to then make a bid for power in an already destabilized situation. If Uzbekistan is already at risk of collapse, U.S. policymakers must not only forge a strategically sound policy, but also direct it toward preventing state failure while we can still do so.

Toward a U.S. Response

The aforementioned defects in U.S. policymaking could actually work against American policy interests in Uzbekistan and Central Asia because they impede a strategic approach and inhibit timely recognition of a crisis spiral in Uzbekistan. Therefore we must rectify U.S. policymaking structure and, with it, our approach to security cooperation. If we wish to achieve in Uzbekistan the removal of a terrorist or other insurgent threat, an independent state that will not fall under Russian or Chinese sway, a developing economy with a liberalizing and democratizing polity we must recast our thinking about security and legitimacy. As Prof. Max Manwaring writes,

> The primary challenge, then, is to come to terms with the fact that contemporary security, *at whatever level*, is at its base a holistic political-diplomatic, socioeconomic, psychological-moral and military-police effort. The corollary is to change from a singular military approach to a multidimensional, multiorganizational, multicultural and multinational paradigm. That in turn requires a conceptual framework and an organizational structure to promulgate unified civil-military planning and implementation of the multidimensional concept.[90]

A holistic concept must be accompanied as well by unified organizational planning. Thus an effective interagency system for reviewing and making policy, based on agreed-upon criteria for progress in meeting the targets envisioned in U.S. aid programs, must emerge. Although this has yet to occur, there are new possibilities.

In the forthcoming Quadrennial Defense Review of 2005, the Pentagon has indicated a greater stress on insurgencies and on countering them. The document not only urges increased cultural training for officers who are going abroad, it also advocates greater attention to so-called post-hostilities operations, that is, instituting a secure peace whether peacemaking or

peacekeeping. It gives the State Department the lead in planning such operations; the National Security Council recently created an Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS) within the State Department. This interagency office will coordinate reconstruction and stabilization activities among civilian agencies, the military, NGOs, and international organizations. According to Ambassador Carlos Pascual, who will head this office, its task is to develop a nonmilitary capacity within the government "to prevent and prepare for post-conflict situations, and to help stabilize and reconstruct societies in transition from conflict and civil strife, so that they can reach a sustainable path toward peace, democracy, and a market economy."[91]

To help this new office, the National Intelligence Council will biannually identify a group of countries regarded as being at greatest risk of instability. S/CRS will then focus on a few of them to plan "crisis prevention or mitigation." Pascual also hopes to create a rapid-response team that would participate in training and exercises devised by this office and could be activated on an emergency basis. S/CRS plans to create a network of people from outside government to research these issues and to identify people with skills needed to work in these countries. Joint civilian and military planning will enable both groups to enter a country and immediately undertake stabilization acivities.[92]

If this office could identify Uzbekistan as a state at risk, it would galvanize the relevant U.S. government bureaucracies to act strategically to prevent or at least mitigate a crisis. As too much experience tells us, governments have a terrible track record in forestalling or averting state failure in governments at risk, and our record is no better. However, some remedies are available in our security cooperation programs and overall policies that could reduce the dangers posed by Uzbekistan’s intransigence on issues of reform.

As long as the war on terrorism continues, the priority for Central Asian policy in general and for Uzbekistan in particular will be the defense relationship with each of those states. One could argue that the stability provided by foreign military presence and assistance helps ensure a stability that, inter alia, makes Uzbekistan and similar countries more attractive to desperately

needed foreign investment.[93] Yet security must not be thought of as residing in defense assistance or in assistance related to nonproliferation or anti-narcotics activities in Uzbekistan, however valuable such programs are. Uzbekistan's security, like that of its neighbors, must be seen holistically, as encompassing economic and political governance, the social safety net, education, and environmental threats.[94] The new State Department office is admirably placed to induce other agencies to work along such lines.

For aid providers, this holistic perspective must be tied to a greater sense of the strategic unity of purpose. Military training and assistance programs must be attached to democratization of internal defense policies and of civil-military relationships within Uzbekistan's armed forces. Similarly, programs to upgrade the quality of the police and intelligence agencies should be explicitly tied to benchmarks of greater democratization, true steps against corruption, and more professionalization. In other words, greater conditionality must be attached to aid to hard-security sectors.

This conditionality must be explained in terms of our continuing support of the regime against the real threats it faces, and of our unwillingness to endorse policies that ultimately undermine the stability of Uzbekistan's domestic regime and endanger our presence there. Those policies contradict the regime's and U.S. interests while benefiting the opposition that poses genuine threats to both states. Conditionality should also be emphasized in U.S. policies toward IFIs operating in Uzbekistan. We should forge a more unified approach with NATO and the EU, and upgrade the quality and extent of their assistance programs to Uzbekistan and other former Soviet republics. Great Britain has now adopted a line that makes human rights the priority issue in its relations with Uzbekistan, and NATO is primed to act more effectively in Central Asia as a whole.[95] NATO's newfound willingness to expand its presence in Afghanistan and Central Asia is most welcome to U.S. officials who agree with Gen. Charles Wald (USAF), deputy commander of U.S. European Command, that ensuring Caspian energy flows is a proper NATO mission.[96]

While ensuring Uzbekistan's security, we must make every effort to expand pro-Western and liberal-oriented sectors of its government, economy, and society. Rather than imposing sanctions, more aid of all kinds should be sent. But aid should go where it can do good and thus should be tailored to specific, often nongovernmental programs within Uzbek society. This aid should be strictly attached to measurable conditions of performance.

A strategic perspective among Washington policymakers should lead to diversified attention in Central Asia and greater attention to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, not only to prevent their incorporation in a Russian or Chinese sphere of influence, but also to reward Kazakhstan for its economic progress and help it emerge from the shadow of becoming a petro-state. There appears to be some recognition in the State Department that Kazakhstan, due to its economic reforms, could become the leader and magnet for stability in Central Asia.[97] Greater support for Kazakhstan may cause Tashkent to sit up and take notice. At that point we should be able to point out that we will reward similar types of policies in Tashkent. It also would be beneficial not just to reassess our aid programs but also to increase them to countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are not much more stable than Uzbekistan and are at equal risk.[98]

Washington must take greater notice of the succession issue in Central Asia generally and in Uzbekistan in particular. As the war on terrorism progresses—assuming it will continue to do so—our focus should change from ensuring defense and hard security to providing for internal security and improved governance to alleviate the conditions that permit the rise of insurgencies, including terrorism. A strategic perspective will look beyond the immediate future to build policies around the preeminence of governance issues and to view security in terms of increased domestic capacity and legitimacy.

As Phillip Bobbit has warned, "legitimacy is a constitutional idea that is sensitive to strategic events."[99] In the present conditions of the Uzbek-American relationship those events must go beyond victory in the war against terrorism to include a change in U.S. policy that is truly strategic and that postulates greater legitimacy as the cause and consequence of victory. Some observers even feel that all Central Asian states are regressing back to premodern or at

least Soviet forms of police states, if not a North Korean model in Uzbekistan's case.[100] Should we fail to account for the risk to Uzbekistan and to ourselves for being closely tied to its government, future strategic events in Central Asia will reflect a lack of legitimacy. If that lack expands to the point of state collapse, not only will the constitutional idea of legitimacy be vulnerable to strategic events, but so too will our position in Uzbekistan. In that case, the effect upon our strategic position will indubitably be a negative one.

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