

# Policy Brief

*Amy McDonough*

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## Human Rights and the Failings of U.S. Public Diplomacy in Eurasia

- ▶ The United States inconsistently addresses human rights and democracy in Eurasia depending on each country's importance to U.S. interests, rather than the human rights conditions;
- ▶ Greater weight should be given to public diplomacy considerations in determining the overall U.S. approach to human rights and democracy promotion;
- ▶ The United States should speak more forthrightly about human rights violations in countries where it has strategic interests;
- ▶ The United States should weave human rights into discussions of other issues, rather than decoupling human rights through dual track engagement.

### Introduction

The degree to which the United States Government holds countries in the former Soviet Union publicly accountable for respecting human rights and democracy depends on each country's relative strategic importance to the United States, not the human rights conditions in each country. U.S. officials publicly laud countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan that are vital to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan or other key interests, while saying as little as possible about these countries' failings in the areas of human rights and democracy.

In countries that are less important to U.S. interests in the region, such as Belarus and Tajikistan, the United States treats progress in human rights and democracy as a requirement for furthering relations and works to "shine a spotlight" on abuses. In Russia, the United States takes a more multifaceted approach, where it speaks openly about human rights and democracy but separates them from other issues in order to maintain a working relationship.

For the region to view the United States as a legitimate promoter and protector of human rights, its rhetoric needs to be more consistent and forthright. The current inconsistent U.S. approach makes publics and elites in the region cynical about the United States, reducing the United States' legitimacy when it does decide to speak out. The current U.S. approach gives allies little incentive to improve their human rights practices while leaving their publics to conclude they cannot rely upon the United States to champion their interests in their defense.

How the United States addresses human rights and democracy with other governments, both in private and in public, will vary based on interests and diplomatic calculations. But the United States' current country-by-country approach in the former Soviet Union is counterproductive.

Instead of continuing to publicly defend human rights and democracy only when it is convenient, the United States should:

1. Give greater weight to public diplomacy considerations in determining its overall approach to human rights and democracy promotion, starting with the precept that the people of a country are as important and attentive an audience for U.S. statements – and U.S. silence – as the government.
2. Speak more forthrightly about human rights violations in countries where the United States has strategic interests. Express concern as a friend of the country. Coming out strongly in defense of human rights does not mean the United States has to speak to other countries as harshly as it does toward Belarus. But there is significant room to increase pressure on countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, whose governments will not change course without greater pressure from the United States and the international community.
3. Weave human rights into discussions of other issues, rather than decoupling human rights as is done with Russia. Take a more nuanced approach and address issues simultaneously to promote progress in multiple areas. When speaking about business, for instance, talk about the human rights and rule of law angles instead of conducting two separate dialogues.

### Public Diplomacy as Hostage to Strategic Interests

This paper studies U.S. public diplomacy on the issue of human rights and democracy in relation to Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. All five countries are rated as “not free” by Freedom House, with the following ratings on a scale of one to seven (with seven as the least free): Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan - 5.5; Belarus - 6.5; Uzbekistan - 7.<sup>i</sup> This paper concludes that the degree to which the United States holds countries in the former Soviet Union publicly accountable for respecting human rights and democracy depends on each country’s relative strategic importance to the United States, not the human rights conditions in the country. This inconsistent approach makes publics and elites in the region cynical about the United States, reducing the United States’ legitimacy when it does decide to speak out. It gives allies little incentive to improve their human rights practices while leaving their publics to conclude they cannot rely upon the United States to actively take a stand in their defense.

### Opposite approaches: Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan versus Belarus

As two countries that the United States relies upon as transit routes for essential logistic support of the international mission in Afghanistan, U.S. officials approach Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan gently and speak of both countries as key partners. They tend to focus on the positive, even when discussing human rights and democracy. In his speech presenting his credentials to President Karimov in July 2011, for example, Ambassador to Uzbekistan George Krol stated that:

The United States strongly believes durable stability should be based on strong, democratic, free, and developed societies that respect the rights of their own citizens and neighbors. Since its independence, Uzbekistan has achieved considerable results. Much attention has been paid to social and economic progress, which has provided for Uzbekistan’s long-term stability and development. The United States wishes to be a reliable and respectful partner to Uzbekistan in establishing security and peace in the region.<sup>ii</sup>

A few months later, Ambassador Krol's counterpart in Kazakhstan, Ambassador Kenneth Fairfax told an interviewer from a pro-government newspaper that:

The United States remains committed to close cooperation with the government of Kazakhstan in all spheres...from the fight against international terrorism to the realization of Kazakhstan's national human rights action plan, which former State Secretary Saudabayev called "eloquent testimony to President Nursultan Nazarbayev's commitment to the further democratization of the country."<sup>iii</sup>

Many public statements focus on key interests the United States has at stake in its relations with these two countries, and why they are treated as such valued partners of the United States. While democracy and human rights are sometimes mentioned as part of the bilateral dialogue, they literally take a backseat, coming farther down the list of issues addressed than those that the United States deems more pressing. For example, in remarks to journalists before a meeting with Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev, President Obama said:

The close relationship between our two countries extends beyond just the nuclear security issue, so this meeting will give us an opportunity to discuss the cooperation that we have built over the last several years with respect to Afghanistan and the help we've received in supplying our troops and helping to assist the Afghan government. We obviously have commercial tie as well, and we'll be discussing how we can deepen those. I'll be interested in discussing with the President efforts to further expand democracy and human rights within Kazakhstan, which will help to lead to further growth and prosperity in the future.<sup>iv</sup>

When U.S. officials do acknowledge human rights and democracy problems, they rarely give specific details, asserting that these types of issues are best discussed privately and not publicized. As Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asia Robert Blake explained to the press regarding bilateral consultations with Uzbek President Islam Karimov:

We had a very long and detailed discussion in the human dimension portion of our annual bilateral consultations that covered the full range of issues regarding human rights, religious freedom, and trafficking in persons. As always, we don't discuss individual cases publicly, or the nature of our dialogue with the government, but we do on a regular basis raise individual cases with the government, and that remains an important part of our dialogue.<sup>v</sup>

On the relatively rare occasions when the United States takes a somewhat more aggressive public line about specific cases of human rights violations in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, its statements are relatively weak and tend to emphasize that the United States is "working with" the countries to address these issues, as opposed to casting them as priority issues that the countries must address if bilateral relations are to progress. Speaking in July 2012, after the violent suppression of a labor protest in the Kazakhstani city of Zhanaozen and a subsequent trial in which many defendants and some witnesses claimed they were tortured to extract testimony, Assistant Secretary of State Blake told the House Foreign Affairs Committee during testimony on U.S. Engagement in Central Asia:

While Kazakhstan has made progress in fulfilling the promise of their chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the OSCE Summit they hosted in 2010, we will continue to work with the Government of Kazakhstan toward our mutual goal of a fully democratic system and strong civil society that work together to protect internationally recognized human rights. In this context, I would note that the United States was disturbed by the use of deadly force against protesters in Zhanaozen last December, and

while we appreciate the legal process that has resulted in convictions of both protestors who used violence and police who reacted with excessive force, we have raised our concerns about allegations of torture, mistreatment and selective punishment of some who were detained during and shortly after the events in Zhanaozen.<sup>vi</sup>

When it comes to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, U.S. officials' public statements tend to downplay democracy promotion efforts. In an interview with Kazakh newspaper Vremya, Ambassador Fairfax was asked whether the United States would insist on the democratic reform of Kazakhstani society. He responded:

"Insist" is probably not the right word to describe the U.S. approach to supporting democracy. The United States strongly supports Kazakhstan's stability, growth and independence. As part of that support, we work with both the Government of Kazakhstan and private groups to support improvements in economic competitiveness, education, health and many other areas. We view the growth of democratic institutions and increased respect for human rights as very important parts of that process. Just as we do with our allies around the world, we engage the Government of Kazakhstan to discuss all of these issues. Those discussions are ongoing and part of a continuous process that, I hope, will continue to grow and expand over time. In some ways, relations between countries can be compared to relations between people. A good friend is someone with whom you can discuss anything, even things that are difficult or uncomfortable to discuss. The U.S. Government considers Kazakhstan to be a very good friend, so we are always working to improve our overall relationship further, including by advocating increased democratization. This is, however, a partnership, and not something we try to force, which is why I objected to the word "insist."<sup>vii</sup>

But while the United States does not "insist" on democracy in Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan, it does in Belarus, refusing to deepen bilateral relations until democratic improvements are made. The United States presents progress in the realm of human rights and democracy as a necessary precursor to improved relations with Belarus. In contrast to U.S. officials' approach to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, human rights and democracy are often the primary issues they mention in relation to Belarus, including former Ambassador George Krol, now the U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan. In an interview with Belarusian news agency BelaPAN at the end of his tour of duty in Belarus, Ambassador Krol stated:

The U.S. government is always open to a better relationship. We are consistent in our position that, if the Belarusian authorities were to simply respect their own constitution and fulfill their own obligations as members of the OSCE to respect the rights of all their citizens, regardless of their political beliefs, and to conduct elections according to international norms, then this would resolve the biggest problem between the American and Belarusian governments. As long as the Belarusian authorities continue to violate the rights of their citizens and their international obligations, there's no way to reach a better relationship.<sup>viii</sup>

Contrary to its approach of keeping discussion of human rights issues with the governments of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan private, the United States speaks forthrightly in public against Belarus and works to hold the government accountable by publicizing human rights violations. As former Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried said in response to a question about pressuring Belarus to restore democracy:

I think the first thing you do is shine a light and speak clearly. We have succeeded in doing that, working with the European Union. As a rule, it's a bad idea to let authoritarian regimes

do their business in the dark alleys. Shine a light and be public about it. Also send your messages to the Belarusian people. Make clear that we are not an enemy of the Belarusian people or the Belarusian nation, that we're not interested in any particular outcome for them other than the sovereignty, democratic future and prosperity of their country.<sup>ix</sup>

Through this spotlight, the United States speaks specifically and in detail about the repression occurring in Belarus. In 2004, for example, State Department Spokesman Richard Boucher released a statement saying that:

The Government of Belarus' persistent violations of human rights and democracy have unfortunately isolated Belarus from the world community rather than leading it to the respected position Belarus should rightfully enjoy among Europe's democracies...We will view any referendum that does not meet international democratic standards as another attempt to manipulate democratic procedures and the Belarusian Constitution in contravention of democratic principles. Flawed parliamentary elections and a flawed referendum will only serve to isolate Belarus further from its neighbors and friends, such as the United States, and will compel us to review our relationship and policies towards the Belarusian leadership.<sup>x</sup>

While American officials tend to refer to Kazakh and Uzbek officials as partners, sometimes even "friends," the words they use to speak of the Belarusian government and state structures are much different. Then-Deputy Assistant Secretary of State David Kramer said in 2006:

I was criticized for not meeting with state media while I was there. The state-controlled television and radio are not a media. They are a KGB front. The reason I did not meet with them is because they have been engaged in a relentless anti-American propaganda campaign in addition to being engaged in an offensive and disgusting campaign against individuals in our U.S. embassy. I tried to tell the authorities in Minsk as clearly as I could that when such offensive and disgusting campaigns came to an end we would then consider talking to people in the state media. Until then, we're not interested...It is important that we go after people and that they pay a price for the abuses that they have engaged in.<sup>xi</sup>

Words even approaching the harshness of "disgusting" and "offensive" are not used in statements about countries that are more closely linked to U.S. interests, affirming the USG's highly inconsistent approach to addressing human rights and democracy in the region.

### The Distorting Role of Afghanistan

To a large extent, the United States' public line toward the countries of Central Asia is determined by its desire to protect logistic routes into Afghanistan, namely the Northern Distribution Network and the Manas Airbase/Transit Center in Kyrgyzstan. This is clear based on statements made by the United States between 2009 and 2011 following elections in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, all of which were widely criticized by OSCE election observers for failing to meet international standards for free and fair elections. The variance between the U.S. Embassy statements correlates with each country's importance to the protection of the logistics routes. The statement from the Embassy in Kyrgyzstan includes a mild expression of concern without stating specifics about the reason for this concern, and then highlights "positive elements" and states that the United States was "encouraged" by the participation of multiple candidates, even though President Bakiyev won a rigged election with more than 76 percent of the vote:



The United States shares the concerns voiced by many observers of the Kyrgyz Republic's July 23 presidential election. While the electoral process had some positive elements, the United States concurs with the preliminary findings of independent observer groups like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) that the election failed to meet many of the Kyrgyz Republic's international commitments. The OSCE...found that the election was marred by widespread irregularities including ballot box stuffing, multiple voting, and misuse of government resources. The United States is encouraged by the participation of multiple candidates in the election process and the accreditation of international and domestic election observers, but urges the unbiased application of election laws throughout the electoral process in accordance with the Kyrgyz Republic's international obligations. The United States remains committed to working with the government and people of the Kyrgyz Republic in achieving a more open and transparent society.<sup>xii</sup>

Even more partial is the statement from the Embassy in Kazakhstan, which begins by congratulating President Nazarbayev, who was re-elected with 96 percent of the vote months before his legal term in office had ended and the election was scheduled (giving the opposition no time to prepare), and after the removal of legal provisions that would have prevented him from running again. The statement endorses the conclusions of the OSCE's election monitors, but focuses on the positives without detailing the monitors' many critical observations:

We congratulate President Nursultan Nazarbayev on his re-election as President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. We look forward to continuing to work with him and the people of Kazakhstan to implement our broad-ranging strategic partnership. We endorse the preliminary conclusions of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). We appreciate the improvements it noted. We urge the government of Kazakhstan to rapidly address the shortcomings the report highlighted. We welcome Kazakhstan's commitments to further liberalize the political environment and believe that continued improvements in the electoral process are critical components.<sup>xiii</sup>

By contrast, the statement from the Embassy in Tajikistan – the only one of the three countries that is not an important link in the Afghanistan logistics chain – is much longer and goes into detail about the many problems that beset that country's election based on direct observation by Embassy observers, not just those of the OSCE:

The U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe closely followed Tajikistan's parliamentary election campaign and assisted in monitoring the February 28 voting. In the run-up to the election, Embassy representatives met with government officials, political party leaders, Tajik political scientists, and its staff served as accredited observers. The Embassy's efforts reflect the U.S. Government's support for the ongoing development of Tajikistan's electoral system.

Initial evaluation of observations by embassy staff election observers indicates that the vote was beset by procedural irregularities and fraud, including cases of ballot stuffing. Embassy observers reported widespread proxy voting and family voting, general lack of adherence to requirements that voters show identification to obtain ballots, disorganization and procedural irregularities in the counting phase, and cases of bias by local election officials in favor of the ruling People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT). Embassy monitors also found one case of a district count of voting station results which did not match the results posted at the station itself, and the discrepancy benefitted the PDPT.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights(ODIHR) also deployed an independent observer mission throughout the country. An ODIHR statement of

preliminary findings said the elections "failed to meet many key OSCE commitments contained in the 1990 Copenhagen document and other international standards for democratic elections."

Though opposition political parties were able to conduct limited election campaigns, they faced an uneven playing field due to substantial support provided to the PDPT by government officials. PDPT materials, banners, and signs were disseminated in a manner consistent with a government-sponsored public mobilization campaign. There were reports that local officials provided administrative support to PDPT candidates and, in some districts, restricted the opportunity of opposition candidates to meet with voters.

There was a lack of coverage of the elections in the media, particularly on state television. The four state television stations declined to broadcast national debates. They allotted the legally required minimum number of minutes for candidates to address voters, but there was little opportunity for candidates to openly debate national issues or discuss government policies in the media. Recent lawsuits by government officials against the newspapers Asia-Plus, Ozadagon, Farazh, Millat, and Paykon had a negative impact on the media's ability to report on political issues in general.

We appreciate the Tajikistan Central Committee on Elections and Referenda's accreditation of election observers from the U.S. Embassy. The embassy will be in close contact with other observer missions and the Government of Tajikistan regarding the issues raised by our observations.<sup>xiv</sup>

### The Middle Ground: Russia

The United States' approach to Russia on human rights and democracy reflects a more complex and layered relationship. The United States speaks loudly about human rights issues in Russia, but the volume and stridency of these statements rises and falls based on other considerations. Through the "Reset" with Russia, the United States decoupled its bilateral interests from its human rights agenda, and pursued them as separate issues so as not to stall progress on other issues, such as arms control, Iran and trade. As Secretary Clinton put it in a March 2010 interview with Russian news station First Channel Television:

What we are trying to do with both China and Russia, is to have such broad and comprehensive relationships that they don't rise or fall on any one issue, no matter how important...So let's take our relationship with Russia. We have spoken out against the murders of journalists. We have spoken out against some of the oppression of dissidents, because we think Russia is a great enough country that it can absorb dissident expression, that people can express their views and that it adds to the dynamism of Russia in the 21st century. But even while we speak out against that, we're hard at work in Geneva to continue to finish the START agreement on nuclear weapons.<sup>xv</sup>

In public statements by U.S. officials, human rights take a seat alongside many other interests of the United States in Russia, including trade and investment, Afghanistan, and non-proliferation.<sup>xvi</sup> While navigating the protection of these other interests, the United States speaks often and openly about Russia's many human rights and democracy problems. One particular instance was the December 2011 Parliamentary elections, which were widely criticized as unfair. After the elections, Secretary Clinton stated in a speech at the OSCE First Plenary Session in Vilnius:

We have serious concerns about the conduct of those elections. Independent political parties, such as PARNAS, were denied the right to register. And the preliminary report by the OSCE cites election day attempts to stuff ballot boxes, manipulate voter lists, and other troubling practices. We're also concerned by reports that independent Russian election observers, including the nationwide Golos network, were harassed and had cyber attacks on their websites, which is completely contrary to what should be the protected rights of people to observe elections, participate in them, and disseminate information. We commend those Russian citizens who participated constructively in the electoral process. And Russian voters deserve a full investigation of electoral fraud and manipulation. And we recognize the Russian Government's willingness to allow the OSCE to observe these elections, we now hope and urge them to take action on the recommendations that will be forthcoming from the OSCE electoral observer mission. The Russian people, like people everywhere, deserve the right to have their voices heard and their votes counted. And that means they deserve fair, free, transparent elections and leaders who are accountable to them...<sup>xvii</sup>

But the United States is not always so outspoken. Secretary Clinton's statement following Vladimir Putin's reelection in March 2012, for example, was much weaker, suggesting that the United States was looking ahead to the difficult issues on which it would have to engage with Putin going forward, including Syria:

I think as the OSCE made clear, there were a number of concerns about this latest electoral process that should be investigated and addressed. And we also remain concerned about the arrests of peaceful protesters, which occurred again on Monday. But the election had a clear winner and we are ready to work with President-elect Putin as he is sworn in and assumes the responsibilities of the presidency. We are going to be looking for ways to enhance cooperation on a range of difficult issues. You mentioned one of them, Syria.<sup>xviii</sup>

Other statements on issues of human rights and democracy in Russia demonstrate that while the U.S. tone is not generally as harsh as used in statements regarding Belarus, the United States is far more forthright in addressing these problems in public than it is in the cases of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, where the United States continually insists that these matters should be discussed privately between governments.<sup>xix</sup> This is particularly striking in that Russia could just as easily cut off U.S. access to the NDN as could Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan.

A unique aspect of the U.S. approach to Russia is its willingness to refer frankly to its own imperfections in the area of human rights. While the United States acknowledges that it needs to improve in this area along with Russia, it also seems to make the rather dubious assumption that the Russian authorities agree on the need for the fundamental protection of human rights and the rule of law, and that this justifies continuing an approach based on partnership. Thus, in a March, 2010 interview with Russian newspaper *The New Times*, Secretary Clinton stated:

The reset of relations between Russia and the U.S. is not merely on a government to government level but also about bringing our two peoples closer together. And it is on the strong foundation of accountable governance and the rule of law that we can strengthen the many ties between our two nations...We reject the idea that some countries are not ready for democracy. We believe that human rights are universal and that all people, regardless of where they live, thrive in an open society where ideas are exchanged freely. This competition of ideas leads to more accountable governance and a more innovative, prosperous economy, which form a solid foundation for the kind of relationship that we are looking for with Russia and Russians.<sup>xx</sup>



As opposed to its approaches to Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, with Russia the United States highlights the proposition that despite friction on some issues, including democracy and human rights, Russia remains a partner. U.S. officials seek to ensure the relationship does not turn overwhelmingly negative while at the same time encouraging greater reform. As President Obama's statement after Putin's election displays, Russia will remain a key partner of the United States no matter what. He stated during remarks following a bilateral meeting with President Medvedev in March 2012:

...the last three years of my work with President Medvedev has been extremely productive...It is true that there have been times where we have had to manage tensions between our countries, and that's to be expected. Obviously, there are always tensions between countries, and that's certainly true given the long history of the Cold War between our two countries. But what I think we've been able to do is to ensure that rather than look backwards, we've been looking forwards...<sup>xxi</sup>

### Conclusions and Recommendations

In her keynote address to a National Democratic Institute award dinner on November 7, 2011 (ironically, the date on which the Soviet Union celebrated the Bolshevik Revolution), Secretary Clinton said: "As a country with many complex interests, we'll always have to walk and chew gum at the same time," addressing both human rights concerns and strategic interests, particularly in friendly states.<sup>xxii</sup> In practice, in the former-Soviet Union the U.S. has been less than successful at this particular type of multitasking, though the approach to Russia demonstrates that the U.S. is capable of walking, chewing gum, and speaking out about its concerns all at the same time.

The United States should adopt this approach throughout the post-Soviet region. As it is, the current country-by-country public diplomacy approach to human rights and democracy lacks consistency, which fuels cynicism toward the United States and minimizes its authority when it does speak out on human rights. The cost of this approach to U.S. interests – including strategic interests – became clear after the April 2010 revolution that overthrew the authoritarian Bakiyev regime in Kyrgyzstan. In an interview with the Washington Post only days after replacing Bakiyev as President, Roza Otunbayeva pointedly stated that:

I would say that we have been really unhappy that the U.S. Embassy here was absolutely not interested in the democratic situation in Kyrgyzstan. It was not paying attention to our difficulties over the last two years. We were not happy that they never had the time to meet with us. We concluded that the base is the most important agenda of the U.S., not our political development and the suffering of the opposition and the closing the papers and the beating of journalists. They turned a blind eye."<sup>xxiii</sup>

This U.S. approach also fails to maximize the incentive for countries to change their behavior, since strategic partners know the United States will not seriously criticize them in public. Meanwhile, the people of these countries see that they cannot rely on the United States to defend them when their rights are threatened or violated because this might put at risk higher U.S. priorities. The long-term danger this perception creates is amply visible in public opinion surveys of attitudes towards the United States carried out in Egypt after the fall of Hosni Mubarak.

While a completely uniform response to human rights is unrealistic given the many different relationships the United States has around the world, it is imperative that U.S. public diplomacy around these issues be more consistent so that other governments take U.S. pronouncements on

human rights more seriously and public opinion abroad is less cynical when the U.S. does speak out. To implement such an approach, the United States needs to implement the following:

## Recommendations

1. Give greater weight to public diplomacy considerations in determining its overall approach to human rights and democracy promotion, starting with the precept that the people of a country are as important and attentive an audience for U.S. statements – and U.S. silence – as the government. Human rights issues can no longer be private issues that are only discussed between governments; the public needs to know that the United States cares enough to speak publicly about these issues.
2. Speak more forthrightly about human rights violations in countries where the United States has strategic interests. While raising the profile of human rights issues, the United States can express concern as a friend of the country in question. Coming out strongly in defense of human rights does not mean the United States has to speak to other countries as harshly as it does toward Belarus or jeopardize strategic relations, but there is significant room to increase pressure on countries such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, whose governments will not change course without greater pressure – both public and private – from the United States and the international community.
3. Weave human rights into discussions of other issues and address them concurrently. Progress in human rights needs to be integrated into and given a prominent position on the agenda for bilateral discussions to ensure that human rights do not lag behind other issues. It is simply impermissible for U.S. officials to state, as they repeatedly do, that they discussed human rights issues “last but not least.” Last is least; it’s a means of trying to ensure that unpleasant discussions on human rights will not poison discussions on other, more strategic issues. When speaking about business, for instance, U.S. officials should focus on the human rights and rule of law angle instead of having two separate discussions. Treating human rights and democracy on a par with other issues will further display the United States’ commitment to these issues and encourage real progress.

<sup>i</sup> Freedom House. Freedom in the World 2012: The Arab Uprisings and Their Global Repercussions.

[http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/FIW%202012%20Booklet--Final.pdf](http://www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/FIW%202012%20Booklet--Final.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> U.S. Embassy, Uzbekistan (July 15, 2011), “Remarks by Ambassador Krol upon Presenting his Credentials to President Karimov.” Available at <http://uzbekistan.usembassy.gov/pr071511.html>

<sup>iii</sup> Ambassador Kenneth Fairfax (3/5/12), Available (in Russian) at [http://megapolis.kz/art/Kennet\\_FEYRFAKS\\_Ya\\_ne\\_dumayu\\_chno\\_u\\_kazahstantsev\\_printsipialno\\_antiamerikanskoe\\_nastroenie](http://megapolis.kz/art/Kennet_FEYRFAKS_Ya_ne_dumayu_chno_u_kazahstantsev_printsipialno_antiamerikanskoe_nastroenie)

<sup>iv</sup> The White House (March 26, 2012), “Remarks by President Obama and President Nursultan Nazarbayev of the Republic of Kazakhstan Before Bilateral Meeting.” Available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/03/26/remarks-president-obama-and-president-nursultan-nazarbayev-republic-kaza>. Similar statement can be found from Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake (September 26, 2012) at: <http://fpc.state.gov/198184.htm>

<sup>v</sup> U.S. Department of State, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (August 17, 2012). Remarks by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, Jr., “Press Availability Following the U.S.-Uzbekistan Annual Bilateral Consultations.” Available at <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/196694.htm>. Similar statement can be found from Ambassador Ken Fairfax (November 1, 2011) at: <http://kazakhstan.usembassy.gov/tr-11-01-11.html>

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- <sup>x</sup> U.S. Department of State, Press Statement, Spokesman Richard Boucher, Washington, DC (September 9, 2004), "Lukashenko Referendum Announcement." Available at <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2004/36064.htm>. Similar statement can be found from State Department Deputy Spokesman Philip Reeker (May 30, 2003) at: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/21094.htm>
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Open Society Institute – Washington D.C. contact on Eurasia:  
Jeff Goldstein – [jeff.goldstein@opensocietyfoundations.org](mailto:jeff.goldstein@opensocietyfoundations.org)  
Tel: (202)721-5600

For all media enquiries related to the work of the Open Society Institute – Washington, D.C. contact:  
Jonathan Kaplan – [jonathan.kaplan@opensocietyfoundations.org](mailto:jonathan.kaplan@opensocietyfoundations.org)  
Tel: (202)721-5600

