



Uzbekistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests

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Summary

Uzbekistan gained independence at the end of 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The landlocked country is a potential Central Asian regional power by virtue of its population, the largest in the region, its substantial energy and other resources, and its location at the heart of regional trade and transport networks. The existing president, Islam Karimov, retained his post following the country's independence, and was reelected in 2000 and 2007. He has pursued a policy of cautiously opening the country to economic and political reforms, and many observers have criticized Uzbekistan's human rights record.

The United States pursued close ties with Uzbekistan following its independence. After the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001, Uzbekistan offered over-flight and basing rights to U.S. and coalition forces. However, U.S. basing rights at Karshi-Khanabad were terminated in 2005 following U.S. criticism and other actions related to the Karimov government's allegedly violent crackdown on unrest in the southern city of Andijon. Since then, the United States has attempted to improve relations, particularly in support of operations in Afghanistan. In 2009, Uzbekistan began to participate in the Northern Distribution Network of land, sea, and air transit routes from Europe through Eurasia for the supply of goods for U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

Cumulative U.S. assistance budgeted for Uzbekistan in FY1992-FY2009 was \$934.0 million (all agencies and programs). Of this aid, \$321 million (over one-third) was budgeted for combating weapons of mass destruction (including Comprehensive Threat Reduction aid) or for Foreign Military Financing. Food, health, and other social welfare and humanitarian aid accounted for \$220 million (nearly one-fourth), and democratization aid accounted for \$168 million (nearly one-fifth). Budgeted assistance was \$12.0 million in FY2010 and an estimated \$11.3 million in FY2011, and the Administration has requested \$11.8 million for FY2012 (numbers include funds from the Assistance for Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia Account and other "Function 150" foreign aid, and exclude Defense and Energy Department funds). The main priorities of U.S. assistance requested for FY2012 are planned to be health, education, agriculture, and trade, including efforts to encourage trade to support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan.

These areas of assistance are permitted under provisions that otherwise limit U.S. aid to Uzbekistan. Since FY2003 (P.L. 108-7), Congress has prohibited foreign assistance to the government of Uzbekistan unless the Secretary of State determines and reports that Uzbekistan is making substantial progress in meeting commitments to respect human rights; establish a multiparty system; and ensure free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and the independence of the media. In FY2008, Congress added a provision blocking Uzbek government officials from entering the United States if they are deemed to have been responsible for events in Andijon or to have violated other human rights.

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Political Background

Uzbekistan gained independence at the end of 1991 with the breakup of the Soviet Union. The landlocked country is the largest in Central Asia in terms of population and the third-largest in territory (behind Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; see box and **Figure 1**). The existing president, Islam Karimov, retained his post following the country's independence, and was reelected in 2000 and 2007. He has pursued a policy of cautiously opening the country to global economic and other influences.

In January 2002, Karimov orchestrated a referendum on a new constitution that created a bicameral legislature. A constitutional provision extended the presidential term to seven years. The legislature (termed the *Oliy Majlis* or Supreme Assembly) consists of a 120-member (later expanded, see below), directly elected lower chamber, the Legislative Chamber, and a 100-member upper chamber, the Senate. The Senate is composed of 16 members appointed by the president, with the rest selected by local legislatures. The Legislative Chamber has formal responsibility for drafting laws. Constitutional amendments approved in April 2003 established that—after the presidential election at the end of 2007—the prime minister would exercise greater power. In January 2005, Karimov explained that he aimed to create three powerful branches of government, to correct a situation where “everything now depends on me.”

Only government-controlled parties operate legally: the Popular Democratic Party (PDP), formerly the communist party headed by Karimov; the Adolat (Justice) Social Democratic Party; the Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP), consisting of government-connected businessmen; and the Milliy Tiklanish (National Revival) Party, consisting of state-supported intellectuals. Opposition parties such as Birdamlik, Birlik, Erk, Free Farmers, and the Sunshine Coalition are illegal. The former Fidokorlar (Self-Sacrifice) National Democracy Party, created by Karimov as a youth party, merged with the National Revival Party in June 2008, and the enlarged party joined the “Democratic Bloc” of Legislative Chamber factions (including Adolat and the Liberal Democratic Party) in August 2008. A constitutional law on parties and democratization came into effect in 2008 that permits “opposition” party deputies in the Legislative Chamber to offer alternative bills and take part in debates. The law also calls for the president to “consult” with Legislative Chamber factions before nominating a candidate for prime minister.

Uzbekistan Basic Facts

Area and Population: Land area is 172,742 sq. mi., slightly larger than California. The population is 28.13 million (World Factbook, July 2011 est.). Administrative subdivisions include the Karakalpak Republic.

Ethnicity: 80% are Uzbek, 5.5% Russian, 5% Tajik, 3% Kazakh, 2.5% Karakalpak, 1.5% Tatar, and others (World Factbook, 1996 est.). More than 1.2 million Uzbeks reside in Afghanistan, 1 million in Tajikistan, and 500,000 in Kyrgyzstan.

Gross Domestic Product: \$85.85 billion; per capita GDP is about \$3,100 (World Factbook, 2010 est., purchasing power parity).

Political Leaders: President: Islam Karimov; Prime Minister: Shavkat Mirziyoyev; Speaker of the Legislative Chamber: Dilorom Toshmhamadova; Speaker of the Senate: Ilgizar Sobirov; Foreign Minister: Elyor Ganiyev; Defense Minister: Major-General Qobil Berdiyev.

Biography: Karimov, born in 1938, worked in Uzbek state planning and finance for much of his early career. In 1989, he became First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. In 1990, the Uzbek Supreme Soviet elected him to the newly created post of president, and he also became a member of the Soviet Communist Party Politburo. In December 1991, he was popularly elected president of Uzbekistan, winning 86% of the vote against opposition Erk Party candidate Mohammad Solikh (Salih). In 1995, Karimov orchestrated a popular referendum to extend his presidency until 2000, won reelection, and in 2002 orchestrated another to extend his term until 2007. He was reelected in December 2007.

In December 2008, President Karimov signed electoral legislation that eliminated the nomination of candidates for legislative and presidential elections by independent initiative groups, leaving only parties as eligible to nominate candidates.¹ The law also expanded the size of the Legislative Chamber from 120 to 150. Fifteen of the members of the Chamber are to be elected by delegates to a conference of the Environmental Movement of Uzbekistan (EMU), registered as a political party in September 2008. The EMU proclaims that it is not like green parties in other countries, so that it can focus on environmental issues rather than grasping for political power.

The Uzbek Central Election Commission (CEC) in mid-November 2007 approved four candidates to run in the prospective December 23, 2007, presidential election. Incumbent President Karimov was nominated by the LDP. The party which Karimov once headed, the PDP, nominated its current head, Asliddin Rustamov. The Adolat Social Democratic Party nominated its head, Dilorom Toshmuhammadova. A citizen's initiative committee nominated Akmal Saidov. The CEC disqualified the candidates nominated by the Milliy Taklanish and Fidokorlar parties at their conventions (the latter party had sponsored Karimov during his 2000 election), saying they had not gathered enough signatures. Although the Uzbek constitution bars a president from more than two terms, the CEC argued that since the most recent constitution was approved in 2002, Karimov's "first term" followed his election in January 2000, and that he was eligible to run for a "second term" in December 2007.

According to the report of a small election observation mission sponsored by the OSCE's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Uzbek CEC and local electoral commissions controlled public appearances and spending by the candidates. There were no campaign debates and media coverage was minimal, according to ODIHR. Each presidential candidate used similar language to laud economic development and democratization under the incumbent president. State-owned media urged the electorate to vote for Karimov. According to the CEC, Karimov received 88% of 14.8 million votes with a 90.6% turnout. Each of the remaining three candidates received about 3% of the vote. The OHIDR election mission issued a press statement assessing the election as "generally fail[ing] to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections." Besides the problems noted above, others included lax rules regarding early voting, frequent voting by one member of a household for all members, and an observed low turnout. In his inaugural address in January 2008, Karimov thanked the citizenry "who gave me a massive vote of confidence by freely expressing their will [in an] election which was held in full compliance with ... universally recognized democratic standards."²

Elections to the Legislative Chamber were held on December 27, 2009. Over 500 candidates from the four approved parties ran for 135 seats, and an additional 15 seats were filled by voting at a conference of the Environmental Movement. Turnout reportedly was almost 88% of 17.2 million registered voters. The Central Electoral Commission reported that in 39 districts no candidate had received over 50% of the vote, so that run-offs would be held on January 10, 2010. Following these run-offs, the Liberal Democratic Party had won 53 seats, the People's Democratic Party had won 32 seats, the Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party had won 31 seats, and the Adolat Social

¹ The chairman of the Legislative Chamber's Committee on Legislation, Nurdinjon Ismoilov hailed the elimination of this nomination process as "primarily aimed at preventing various troublemakers from getting into parliament, including members of organized crime groups, and their acquiring deputy immunity. This measure also prevents a parliament post from being used to pursue clannishness and promote parochial and corporate interests." *National Word*, 6 December, 2008, quoted in Sukhrobjon Ismoilov and Sanzhar Saidov, "On the Results of the Parliamentary Elections in Uzbekistan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2010.

² Open Source Center, *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), January 16, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950404.

Democratic Party had won 19 seats. The OSCE declined to send observers, stating that the electoral environment did not permit a free and fair contest. Some U.S. embassy personnel observed some of the voting, and the embassy stated afterward that the election campaign failed to reflect diverse viewpoints, since candidates from only pro-Karimov parties were permitted to run.³ Indirect elections to the Senate were held on January 20-22, 2010. The president's 16 appointees to the Senate included deputy prime ministers, the chairman of the Supreme Court, and the foreign minister, making the Senate an amalgam of the three branches of government.

Perhaps to create the appearance of diversity, the Liberal Democratic Party, the Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party, and the Adolat Social Democratic Party have declared that they form a "majority democratic bloc" in the Legislative Chamber. The People's Democratic Party has declared that it is the "minority opposition" party. Opening a joint session of the newly elected legislature in late January 2010, President Karimov called for studying the activities of the U.S. Congress in order to boost the role of budgeting and oversight in the Uzbek legislature.⁴

In a speech in November 2010, President Karimov called for various constitutional changes which were approved by the legislature in March 2001 and signed into law by the president in April 2011. One of the changes provides for the political party that controls a majority of seats in the lower legislative chamber to have the right to nominate a candidate for prime minister (all existing political parties are pro-Karimov). Procedures also are outlined for the legislature to hold a vote of no confidence in the prime minister. The prime minister is given responsibility for appointing regional administrators, a power formerly lodged with the president. Another amendment specifies that in the event the president is incapacitated, the chairman of the Senate will serve as the interim head of state pending the holding of a presidential election within three months. Some skeptics have linked the constitutional changes to government concerns that civil discontent could become manifest as it did in several Middle Eastern countries in early 2011. Others suggest that since some of the ostensible reform efforts predate the "Arab Spring," they are linked to infighting within the elite. Perhaps supporting the latter view, in mid-July 2011 the legislature passed a joint resolution criticizing an economic report delivered by the prime minister.⁵

Human Rights

Assessing human rights developments in 2010, Human Rights Watch, a non-government organization (NGO), has reported that "Uzbekistan's human rights record remains abysmal.... Authorities continue to crack down on civil society activists, opposition members, and independent journalists, and to persecute religious believers who worship outside strict state controls. Freedom of expression remains severely limited."⁶ However, Assistant Secretary of

³ OSCE. ODIHR. *Republic of Uzbekistan Parliamentary Elections 27 December 2009: OSCE/ODIHR Needs Assessment Mission Report*, October 21-22, 2009; Deirdre Tynan, "Uzbekistan: Tashkent Holds Parliamentary Elections," *Eurasia Insight*, December 28, 2009. Uzbek analysts Sukhrobjon Ismoilov and Sanzhar Saidov claim that turnout was actually around 50% or less and that candidates were pre-designated to win seats. They argue that even though "the political parties of Uzbekistan are incapable of rallying people around them and governing the state," the parties are gaining experience and eventually may be permitted to freely and effectively aggregate interests. "On the Results of the Parliamentary Elections in Uzbekistan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 11, Issue 1, 2010.

⁴ *CEDR*, January 28, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-950069.

⁵ *CEDR*, July 22, 2011, Doc. No. CEP-950121.

⁶ *World Report 2011: Events of 2010*, Human Rights Watch, January 24, 2011.

State Michael Posner stated during a visit to Uzbekistan in June 2010 that “there are a number of [human rights] fields that the government here has made progress in,” such as permitting the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit prisons, submitting a human rights report to the U.N. under the Universal Periodic Review, increasing the power of the legislature, and carrying out parliamentary exchanges with the U.S. Congress.⁷ The U.S. government also praised Uzbekistan’s efforts to temporarily shelter displaced persons fleeing ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.

According to the State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, police routinely beat and otherwise mistreated detainees to obtain confessions. Sources reported that torture and abuse were common in prisons and pretrial facilities. A few criminal cases were opened against police charged with torture or other brutal treatment of prisoners or detainees. Corruption among law enforcement personnel remained a problem. Police routinely and arbitrarily detained citizens to extort bribes. There were at least 11 publicized prosecutions of law enforcement officials on corruption-related charges. Authorities continued to arrest persons arbitrarily on charges of extremism, including association with banned religious groups. Human rights activists and journalists who criticized the government were subject to physical attack, harassment, arbitrary arrest, and politically motivated prosecution and detention. The judicial branch often took direction from the executive branch. Observers estimated that authorities held 13 to 25 individuals on political grounds. There were reports that security forces entered the homes of human rights activists and members of some religious groups without a warrant.

The Uzbek government tightly controlled broadcast and print media, according to the State Department. Police and security services increasingly subjected print and broadcast journalists to harassment and arrest. Journalists reported that there were officials whose responsibilities included censorship. The Uzbekistan National News Agency cooperated closely with presidential staff to prepare and distribute all officially sanctioned news and information. The government reported that there were 1,172 registered newspapers, magazines, news agencies, electronic media outlets, and Web sites. Three of the country’s most influential national daily newspapers were government owned, as well as several other daily and weekly publications. The government allowed publication of a few private newspapers. Four state-run channels dominated television broadcasting. Numerous privately owned regional television stations and privately owned radio stations were influential among local audiences. The government continued to refuse Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Voice of America, and BBC World Service permission to broadcast from within the country.

The Uzbek government continued to restrict freedom of assembly and association, according to the State Department. The government often did not grant the required permits for demonstrations and dispersed and sometimes detained those involved in peaceful protests. The government compelled most local NGOs to join a government-controlled NGO association that allowed the government some control over their funding and activities. Penalties were imposed against international NGOs for engaging in political activities, activities inconsistent with their charters, or activities the government did not approve in advance. The government required NGOs to submit detailed reports every six months on any grant funding received, events conducted, and planned events for the next period. The government suppressed political opposition. The law made it extremely difficult for genuinely independent political parties to organize, nominate

⁷ U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, *Press Conference with Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor Michael Posner*, June 18, 2010.

candidates, and campaign. The government also exercised control over established parties by controlling their financing and media exposure.⁸

Since November 2006, the State Department has designated Uzbekistan a “country of particular concern” (CPC), for severe religious and other human rights violations that could lead to U.S. sanctions. In its most recent report in May 2011, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reported that “the Uzbek government ... harshly penalizes individuals for independent religious activity, regardless of their religious affiliation. A restrictive religion law severely limits the rights of all religious communities and facilitates the Uzbek government’s control over them, particularly the majority Muslim community.... The State Department should again designate Uzbekistan as a CPC.” In June 2011, the State Department reported that Uzbekistan is a source country for human trafficking for forced labor and sex, and that the government demonstrated negligible progress in ceasing forced labor, including forced child labor, in the annual cotton harvest. The State Department also stated that Uzbekistan did not make efforts to investigate or prosecute government officials suspected to be complicit in forced labor, so would remain on the “Tier 2 Watch List” of countries that do not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking.⁹

In 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor listed all the Central Asian states as countries that use child labor to pick cotton. This list was meant to inform the choices made by the buying public. In addition, on July 20, 2010, cotton from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan was added to a list that requires U.S. government contractors to certify that they have made a good faith effort to determine whether forced or indentured child labor was used to produce the cotton.¹⁰ In June 2011, the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations of the U.N.’s International Labor Organization (ILO) discussed the issue of child labor in Uzbekistan, with the U.S. representative raising concerns. The committee concluded that despite denials by the Uzbek government, “there was broad consensus among the United Nations bodies, the representative organizations of workers and employers and NGOs, regarding the ... systemic and persistent recourse to forced child labor in cotton production, involving an estimated 1 million children.... The Committee expressed its serious concern at the insufficient political will and the lack of transparency of the [Uzbek] Government to address the issue.”¹¹

At his confirmation hearing on May 15, 2011, Ambassador-designate to Uzbekistan George Krol reportedly stated that the United States will “relentlessly raise individual cases of [human rights] repression both privately and publicly at all levels of the Uzbekistani government and will seek to identify opportunities to support and expand space for civil society and human rights activists.”

⁸ U.S. Department of State. *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2010*, April 8, 2011.

⁹ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Annual Report*, May 1, 2009, *Annual Report*, May 1, 2010, and *Annual Report*, May 1, 2011; U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 27, 2011.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of International Labor Affairs. Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking. *The Department of Labor’s List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor*, September 3, 2009; Executive Order 13126, *Prohibition of Acquisition of Products Produced by Forced or Indentured Child Labor*, at <http://www.dol.gov/ILAB/regs/eo13126/main.htm>.

¹¹ U.N. International Labor Organization, Conference, 100th Session, Provisional Record, No. 18, Part 2, *Third Item on the Agenda: Information and Reports on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, Report of the Committee on the Application of Standards, Observations And Information Concerning Particular Countries*, June 16, 2011, p. 114.

He also pledged that the United States would continue to support “embattled civil society and independent media.”¹²

Increased government concerns related to the “Arab Spring” have contributed to an Uzbek crackdown on social media on the Internet and cell phones. In September 2011, a Facebook-like social networking website is being launched by an Uzbek firm that some observers suggest may be easily monitored.

Economic Developments

After economic dislocations associated with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Uzbek economy ceased to decline and began to turn around in 1996. In 2003, Uzbekistan announced that it would permit full currency convertibility, but vitiated the reform by reducing money in circulation, closing borders, and placing punitive tariffs on imports. These restrictions helped fuel organized crime, corruption, and consumer shortages. Uzbekistan is the world’s fifth-largest cotton producer and second-largest exporter. About one-fifth of the country’s economic activity is based on agriculture (which employs 44% of the workforce). The largest portion of foreign currency earnings is based on cotton exports, followed by exports of gold and natural gas. The government closely controls export earning sectors. Over one-quarter of the population remains below the poverty level, and a large portion of the working-age population has migrated abroad for work. Some commercial firms have boycotted purchases of Uzbek cotton and finished goods on the grounds that forced child labor is used to pick the cotton.

In response to the global economic downturn in 2008, the Uzbek government launched an anti-crisis program to increase budgetary expenditures on infrastructure modernization, extend credit to export industries, restructure bank debts, boost investment in small-sized businesses, and augment public-sector wages and social welfare. Transfers from the Fund for Reconstruction and Development, a pool of export and portfolio earnings launched in 2006, are being used for some of these expenditures, although the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) business firm alleges that mainly state-owned companies receive the funds. President Karimov reported that the fund held \$3.7 billion at the end of 2009.

The Uzbek government reported that GDP increased by 8.5% in 2010. The EIU states that the Uzbek government’s economic data are untrustworthy, but that the Uzbek economy may have improved somewhat during the year, bolstered by rising revenues from natural gas exports and increased remittances from migrant workers. The government also reduced personal income and profit taxes and increased public-sector wages and benefits in 2010 to bolster growth. The government reports that GDP has grown 8% during the first half of 2011, led by increasing gold, automobile, and cotton exports and a robust grain harvest. The EIU has estimated that consumer inflation, which averaged 15% in 2010, may increase slightly to 16% in 2011, due to continuing high food prices early in the year and rises in wages and benefits. According to EIU, currency controls and high tariffs on imports continue to discourage some Western investors.¹³ Some foreign media have reported that Uzbek authorities in recent months have stepped up raids against dozens of domestic and foreign businesses, accusing them of tax and other violations, and have

¹² Catherine Fitzpatrick, “Uzbekistan Weekly Roundup,” *Eurasianet*, June 3, 2011; U.S. Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, Nomination Hearing, *Statement by George Krol, Nominee for Ambassador to Uzbekistan*, May 17, 2011.

¹³ *Uzbekistan: Country Report*, Economist Intelligence Unit, August 2011.

forced them to close.¹⁴ Other transnational corporations and governments continue to invest in Uzbekistan. In June 2011, a flat tax for small and medium-sized businesses with less than 100 employees went into effect. That tax, along with new excise taxes on imported goods, threatens to put many small firms out of business, according to some observers. The government states that these firms contribute over 50% of GDP.

The International Crisis Group, an NGO, claimed in early 2011 that Uzbekistan has experienced massive declines in the quality of healthcare, education, transportation, and other infrastructure that threaten its future. The NGO also warns that “systematic change is impossible [in Uzbekistan] because of overwhelming state control, ideological constraints and a fear of genuine innovation.”¹⁵

Russia is the largest importer of Uzbek natural gas, up to 547 billion cubic feet in 2010. Uzbekistan’s domestic gas pipeline system was connected to the Central Asia-China gas pipeline at the end of 2010, and Uzbekistan plans to export up to 353 billion cubic feet of gas in 2011 to China. Uzbekistan has supplied some petroleum products and electricity to Afghanistan, but Uzbek oil production has been declining, leading to petrol shortages within Uzbekistan.

Foreign Policy and Defense

Home to more than half of the population of Central Asia, Uzbekistan seeks to play a leading role in regional affairs. From the late 1990s until mid-2005, Karimov’s priority was to seek closer ties with the United States, the European Union, and NATO while maintaining working relations with Russia and China. However, after the mid-2005 events in Andijon (see below), he shifted to closer ties with the latter two states. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and in 2003 insisted on hosting its Regional Anti-Terrorism Center. Uzbekistan has ongoing tensions with other Central Asian states over its mining of borders, water-sharing, border delineation, and other issues. In July 2008, the head of the Tajik Supreme Court asserted that Uzbek security forces had bombed the Supreme Court building the previous summer as part of efforts to topple the government. In 2002, the Turkmen government accused Uzbek officials of conspiring to overthrow it. The Kyrgyz premier rejected claims by Karimov in 2005 that Kyrgyzstan had provided training facilities and other support for the Andijon militants. Karimov again accused Kyrgyzstan in late May 2009 of harboring terrorists that had attacked across the border.

After the April 2010 coup in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan tightened border controls with this country, greatly harming its economy. Conflict between ethnic Uzbeks and ethnic Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 further strained relations between the two countries. Up to 100,000 ethnic Uzbeks fled fighting in southern Kyrgyzstan to refugee camps in Uzbekistan. Although critical of the Kyrgyz government, Uzbekistan did not intervene militarily or permit its citizens to enter Kyrgyzstan to join in the fighting. According to Assistant Secretary of State Eric Schwartz, “the Government of Uzbekistan acted quickly and constructively in response to the humanitarian

¹⁴ Catherine Fitzpatrick, “Uzbekistan: Weekly Roundup,” *Eurasianet*, August 19, 2011.

¹⁵ *Central Asia: Decay and Decline*, International Crisis Group, February 3, 2011.

crisis, [and] cooperated closely with U.N. agencies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and non-governmental organizations. These efforts helped many people in a time of dire need.”¹⁶

Tajikistan has alleged that Uzbekistan delays rail freight shipments, purportedly to pressure Tajikistan to halt construction of the Rogun hydro-electric power dam on the Vakhsh River, which Uzbekistan fears could limit the flow of water into the country.

Uzbekistan has developed some ties with post-Taliban Afghanistan. In August 2011, Uzbekistan completed a 50-mile railroad linking its border town of Hairatan with the city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan. The railway is part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) of U.S. and NATO-developed land, air, and sea routes from Europe through Eurasia to Afghanistan. Since 2002, Uzbekistan has provided some electricity to northern Afghanistan. Since early 2008, President Karimov has advocated the opening of U.N.-sponsored “6+3” Afghan peace talks (participants would include regional powers Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, China, and Iran and outside powers NATO, the United States, and Russia), similar to the “6+2” Afghan peace talks he had helped originate and which were held from 1999 to 2001 (NATO was not included at that time). The United States has stressed an Afghan-led reconciliation process (see also below, “Contributions to Counter-Terrorism”).

The Uzbek military is the most advanced among those of the Central Asian states. The armed forces consist of about 50,000 ground force troops and 17,000 air force troops. There are also up to 19,000 internal security (police) troops and 1,000 national guard troops.¹⁷ Uzbekistan’s military doctrine proclaims that it makes no territorial claims on other states and adheres to nuclear non-proliferation. Military cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan is ensured through a 1992 Friendship Treaty, a 1994 military treaty, a 1999 accord on combating terrorism and Islamic extremism, and a November 2005 Treaty of Alliance. The latter accord calls for mutual consultations in case of a security threat to either party. After withdrawing in 1999, Uzbekistan rejoined the Collective Security Treaty Organization in December 2006 (CSTO; members now include Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan). Uzbekistan has appeared wary of Russian intentions regarding the CSTO, including by insisting that it will not participate in rapid reaction forces established in June 2009 unless they pledge to not become involved in disputes within the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Terrorism and Unrest

On February 16, 1999, six bomb blasts in Tashkent’s governmental area by various reports killed 16-28 and wounded 100-351. Karimov termed the bombing an assassination attempt. He alleged that exiled Erk Party leader Mohammad Solikh (Salih) led the plot, assisted by Afghanistan’s Taliban and IMU co-leader Tahir Yuldashev. Solikh denied any role in the bombings. In November 2000, Yuldashev and Namanganiy received death sentences and Solikh 15.5 years in prison. Another defendant, Najmiddin Jalolov (see below), received 18 years (all *in absentia*). Other security threats included the invasion of neighboring Kyrgyzstan in July-August 1999 by several hundred IMU and other guerrillas. They were rumored to be aiming to create an Islamic state in south Kyrgyzstan as a springboard for a jihad in Uzbekistan. By mid-October 1999, they

¹⁶ U.S. Department of State. *Opening Statement of Assistant Secretary Schwartz*, June 29, 2010. See also “Tashkent’s Response to Kyrgyz Crisis Boosts Karimov’s Image,” *Eurasianet*, July 15, 2010.

¹⁷ International Institute of Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance*, March 7, 2011.

had been forced out of Kyrgyzstan with Uzbek aid. In August 2000, dozens of IMU and other guerrillas again invaded Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but were expelled by late October. In September 2000, the State Department designated the IMU as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and stressed that the “United States supports the right of Uzbekistan to defend [itself against] the violent actions of the IMU.”

A series of bombings and armed attacks took place in Uzbekistan in late March-early April 2004, reportedly killing 47 individuals. President Karimov asserted that the attacks were aimed to “cause panic among our people, [and] to make them lose their trust” in the government. The then-Combined Forces Commander for Afghanistan, Lieutenant General David Barno, visited Uzbekistan in April 2004 and stressed that “we stand with Uzbekistan in facing down this terrorist menace.” The obscure Islamic Jihad Union of Uzbekistan (IJU; reportedly a breakaway faction of the IMU) claimed responsibility. Suspected terrorists testified at a trial in mid-2004 that Jalolov was the leader of IJU, that they were trained by Arabs and others at camps in Kazakhstan and Pakistan, and that the IJU was linked to Hizb ut-Tahrir, the Taliban, Uighur extremists, and Al Qaeda. During this trial, explosions occurred on July 30, 2004, at the U.S. and Israeli embassies and the Uzbek Prosecutor-General’s Office in Tashkent. The IMU and IJU claimed responsibility.

On May 25-26, 2009, a police checkpoint was attacked on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, attacks took place in the border town of Khanabad, and four bombings occurred in Andijon in the commercial district, including at least one by suicide bombers. Several deaths and injuries were alleged, although reporting was suppressed. Uzbek officials blamed the IMU, although the IJU allegedly claimed responsibility. President Karimov flew to Andijon on May 31. In late August 2009, shootings took place in Tashkent that resulted in the deaths of three alleged IMU members and the apprehension of other group members. The Uzbek government alleged that the group had been involved in the 1999 explosions and in recent assassinations in Tashkent.

In May 2005, the State Department designated the IJG/IJU as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Specially Designated Global Terrorist, and in June, the U.N. Security Council added the IJG/IJU to its terrorism list.¹⁸ In June 2008, Jalolov and his associate Suhayl Fatilloevich Buranov were added to the U.N. 1267 Sanctions Committee’s Consolidated List of individuals and entities associated with Osama bin Laden, al Qaeda, and the Taliban. Also, the U.S. Treasury Department ordered that any of their assets under U.S. jurisdiction be frozen and prohibited U.S. citizens from financial dealings with the terrorists.¹⁹

The 2005 Violence in Andijon, Uzbekistan

Dozens or perhaps hundreds of civilians were killed or wounded on May 13, 2005, after Uzbek troops fired on demonstrators in the eastern town of Andijon. The protestors had gathered to demand the end of a trial of local businessmen charged with belonging to an Islamic terrorist group. The night before, a group stormed a prison where those on trial were held and released

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State. Press Statement: U.S. Department of State Designates the Islamic Jihad Group Under Executive Order 13224, May 26, 2005; U.N. Security Council. The Al-Qaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee. Press Release: Security Council Committee Adds One Entity to Al-Qaida Section of Consolidated List, SC/8405, June 3, 2005.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of the Treasury. Press Release: Treasury Designates Leadership of the IJU Terrorist Group, June 18, 2008.

hundreds of inmates.²⁰ Many freed inmates then joined others in storming government buildings. President Karimov flew to the city to direct operations, and reportedly had restored order by late on May 13.²¹ On July 29, 439 people who had fled from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan were airlifted to Romania for resettlement processing, after the United States and others raised concerns that they might be tortured if returned to Uzbekistan.²²

The United States and others in the international community repeatedly called for an international inquiry into events in Andijon, which the Uzbek government rejected as violating its sovereignty. In November 2005, the EU Council approved a visa ban on 12 Uzbek officials it stated were “directly responsible for the indiscriminate and disproportionate use of force in Andijon and for the obstruction of an independent inquiry.” The Council also embargoed exports of “arms, military equipment, and other equipment that might be used for internal repression.”²³ In October 2007 and April 2008, the EU Council suspended the visa ban for six months but left the arms embargo in place. In October 2008, the EU Council praised what it viewed as some positive trends in human rights in Uzbekistan and lifted the visa ban, although it left the arms embargo in place.²⁴ In October 2009, it lifted the arms embargo.

At the first major trial of 15 alleged perpetrators of the Andijon unrest in late 2005, the accused all confessed and asked for death penalties. They testified that they were members of Akramiya, a branch of HT launched in 1994 by Akram Yuldashev that allegedly aimed to use force to create a caliphate in the area of the Fergana Valley located in Uzbekistan. Besides receiving assistance from HT, Akramiya was alleged to receive financial aid and arms training from the IMU. The defendants also claimed that the U.S. and Kyrgyz governments helped finance and support their effort to overthrow the government, and that international media colluded with local human rights groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in this effort. The U.S. and Kyrgyz governments denied involvement, and many observers criticized the trial as appearing stage-managed. Reportedly, 100 or more individuals were arrested and sentenced, including some Uzbek opposition party members and media and NGO representatives.²⁵ Partly in response, the U.S. Congress tightened conditions on aid to Uzbekistan (see below).

²⁰ There is a great deal of controversy about whether this group contained foreign-trained terrorists or was composed mainly of the friends and families of the accused. See U.S. Congress. Commission on Security and Cooperation In Europe. Briefing: The Uzbekistan Crisis. *Testimony of Galima Bukharbayeva, Correspondent. Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, June 29, 2005. For a contrasting assessment, see Shirin Akiner, *Violence in Andijon, 13 May 2005: An Independent Assessment*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, July 2005; and AbduMannob Polat, *Reassessing Andijan: The Road to Restoring U.S.-Uzbek Relations*, Jamestown Foundation, June 2007.

²¹ Analyst Adeeb Khalid draws a parallel between the Uzbek government’s actions at Andijon and at a large student demonstration in Tashkent in January 1992. In the latter case, Karimov allegedly ordered troops to fire on the marchers, resulting in up to six deaths and two dozen or more injuries. *Islam After Communism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 155. See also Reuters, January 17, 1992.

²² See also CRS Report RS22161, *Unrest in Andijon, Uzbekistan: Context and Implications*, by Jim Nichol.

²³ Council of the European Union, *Uzbekistan: Council Adopts Restrictive Measures*, Press Release 14392/05, November 14, 2005. U.S. officials argued that the United States already had been limiting military assistance—at congressional request—because of human rights abuses.

²⁴ Council of the European Union, 2824th General Affairs Council Meeting, *Press Release*, October 15-16, 2007; 2864th and 2865th General Affairs and External Relations Council Meetings, *Press Release*, April 29, 2008; 2897th General Affairs and External Relations Council Meeting, *Press Release*, October 13, 2008. Some international human rights groups protested against a visit by the head of the Uzbek state security service—who had been subject to the visa ban lifted by the COE—to Germany in late October 2008. He reportedly advised German officials on IJU activities in Central Asia.

²⁵ OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), *Report from the OSCE/ODIHR Trial* (continued...)

U.S. Relations

According to testimony to Congress by Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, “Uzbekistan remains a valued partner for its participation in the Northern Distribution Network [various U.S. military and NATO land, sea, and air supply routes transiting Central Asia to Afghanistan] and its role in Afghanistan reconstruction. A few years ago Uzbekistan began a new effort to export reasonably-priced electricity to Afghanistan.... Uzbekistan has facilitated transit for essential supplies to coalition forces in Afghanistan.” He also stated that the Obama Administration in late 2009 began annual bilateral consultations with Uzbekistan to elevate dialogue, make contacts regular, and achieve greater cooperation on trade, the human dimension, and energy issues.²⁶

During President Karimov’s March 2002 U.S. visit, former Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Komilov and former Secretary of State Colin Powell signed a *Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation* that set forth broad-scale goals for political, economic, security, and humanitarian cooperation. The accord pledged the United States to “urgent consultations” in the case of external security threats to Uzbekistan and pledged Uzbekistan “to further intensify the democratic transformation of society in the political, economic and spiritual areas,” and to “ensure the effective exercise and protection of human rights.”²⁷ U.S. relations with Uzbekistan were set back in 2005 after the United States joined others in the international community to criticize an Uzbek government crackdown in the town of Andijon (see above). The criticism contributed to Uzbekistan’s closure of over a dozen U.S.-based or U.S.-supported non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the termination of U.S. basing rights at Karshi-Khanabad (see below), a fall-off in official and diplomatic contacts, and the strengthening of U.S. congressional restrictions on aid to the Uzbek government (see directly below).

U.S.-Uzbek relations recently have improved, according to the Administration. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake visited Uzbekistan in November 2009 and stated that his meetings there were “a reflection of the determination of President Obama and Secretary Clinton to strengthen ties between the United States and Uzbekistan.” He proposed that the two countries set up high-level annual consultations to “build our partnership across a wide range of areas. These include trade and development, border security, cooperation on narcotics, the development of civil society, and individual rights.”²⁸ The first Bilateral Consultation meeting took place in late December 2009 with a U.S. visit by an Uzbek delegation led by Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov. The two sides drew up a plan for cooperation for 2010 that involved diplomatic visits, increased military-to-military contacts, and investment and trade overtures.²⁹

(...continued)

Monitoring in Uzbekistan, April 21, 2006; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Uzbekistan, *Comments on the Report Prepared by the OSCE ODIHR*, April 19, 2006.

²⁶ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, Hearing on U.S. Relations with Europe and Eurasia, *Testimony by Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs*, March 10, 2011.

²⁷ U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, *Press Release: United States-Uzbekistan Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework*, March 12, 2002, at <http://uzbekistan.usembassy.gov/pr031203.html>.

²⁸ U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. *Press Conference of Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake*, October 14, 2009.

²⁹ *CEDR*, January 29, 2010, Doc. No. CEP-4019.

During her December 2010 visit to Uzbekistan, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that an improved bilateral relationship was “crucial” to U.S. interests. She reportedly thanked President Islam Karimov for Uzbekistan’s support for the Northern Distribution Network (transport routes supporting military operations in Afghanistan) and for other assistance to Afghanistan. She stated that issues of human rights also had been discussed. She hailed the signing of a bilateral science and technology cooperation agreement as an effort “to try to find other ways to connect with and promote positive cooperation between our two countries.”³⁰ After Secretary Clinton’s visit, a small pro-democracy rally in Tashkent, the capital, was broken up. In November 2010, Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake testified to Congress that “the Obama Administration has increased its engagement with Uzbekistan on a full agenda of security, economic and human rights issues. In the regional security field, Uzbekistan has become a key partner for the United States’ effort in Afghanistan.... It has facilitated transit for essential supplies to Coalition forces and constructed an important railroad line inside of Afghanistan. Through this increased engagement, we have seen an improved relationship with Uzbekistan, but many challenges remain. We continue to encourage the Uzbek authorities to address significant human rights concerns.”³¹

The second U.S.-Uzbek Bilateral Consultation meeting took place in February 2011 with a visit to Uzbekistan led by Assistant Secretary Blake. The talks reportedly included security cooperation, trade and development, science and technology, counter-narcotics, civil society development, and human rights. A U.S. business delegation discussed means to increase trade ties. Blake reported that the United States had purchased \$23 million in Uzbek goods for transit to Afghanistan in FY2010 (see below).

Cumulative U.S. assistance budgeted for Uzbekistan in FY1992-FY2009 was \$934.0 million (all agencies and programs). Of this aid, \$321 million (over one-third) was budgeted for combating weapons of mass destruction (including Comprehensive Threat Reduction aid) or for Foreign Military Financing. Food, health, and other social welfare and humanitarian aid accounted for \$220 million (nearly one-fourth), and democratization aid accounted for \$168 million (nearly one-fifth). Budgeted assistance was \$12.0 million in FY2010 and an estimated \$11.3 million in FY2011, and the Administration has requested \$11.8 million for FY2012 (numbers include funds from the Assistance for Eastern Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia Account and other “Function 150” foreign aid, and exclude Defense and Energy Department funds). The main priorities of U.S. assistance requested for FY2012 are planned to be health, education, agriculture, and trade, including efforts to encourage trade to support U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan.

These areas of assistance are permitted under provisions that otherwise limit U.S. aid to Uzbekistan. Since FY2003 (P.L. 108-7), Congress has prohibited foreign assistance to the government of Uzbekistan unless the Secretary of State determines and reports that Uzbekistan is making substantial progress in meeting commitments to respect human rights; establish a multiparty system; and ensure free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and the independence of the media. Congress received a determination of progress in FY2003. In FY2004 and thereafter, however, some aid to Uzbekistan has been withheld because of lack of progress on democratic reforms. In FY2008, Congress added a provision blocking Uzbek government

³⁰ U.S. Department of State, *Meeting With Staff and Their Families of Embassy Tashkent*, December 2, 2010.

³¹ U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, Hearing on the Emerging Importance of the U.S.-Central Asia Partnership, *Testimony of Robert O. Blake, Jr., Assistant Secretary, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs*, November 17, 2010.

officials from entering the United States if they are deemed to have been responsible for events in Andijon or to have violated other human rights.

In late 2009, Congress permitted (P.L. 111-84, §801)—for the first time since restrictions were put in place—the provision of some assistance on national security grounds to facilitate the acquisition of supplies for U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan from countries along the Northern Distribution Network. In 2012, \$100,000 is requested under the Foreign Military Financing program to provide non-lethal equipment to facilitate Uzbekistan’s protection of the Northern Distribution Network. In 2010, Congress permitted (P.L. 111-117)—for the first time since the restrictions were put in place—an expanded IMET program for training Uzbek military officers on human rights, civilian control of the military, and other democracy topics. For 2012, \$300,000 is requested for expanded IMET.³²

Contributions to Counter-Terrorism

An agreement on the U.S. use of the Khanabad airbase, near the town of Karshi (termed the K2 base) for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan was signed in October 2001, and a joint statement pledged the two sides to consult in the event of a threat to Uzbekistan’s security and territorial integrity. This non-specific security pledge was reiterated in the March 2002 “Strategic Partnership” accord (mentioned above). In addition to security assurances and increased military and other aid, U.S. forces in Afghanistan killed many terrorists belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU; dedicated to the forceful establishment of Islamic rule in Uzbekistan). Following U.S. criticism of Uzbek government actions in Andijon, the government demanded at the end of July 2005 that the United States vacate K2 within six months. On November 21, 2005, the United States officially ceased operations at K2. The Uzbek government has permitted Germany to maintain a small airbase at Termez with about 163 troops. According to some German reports, the country has paid an average of 11 million euros since 2002 for basing privileges.³³

Among possible signs of improving U.S.-Uzbek relations, in early 2008 Uzbekistan reportedly permitted U.S. military personnel under NATO command, on a case-by-case basis, to transit through an airbase near the town of Termez that it has permitted Germany to operate.³⁴ President Karimov attended the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Romania, in early April 2008 and stated that Uzbekistan was ready to discuss the transit of non-lethal goods and equipment by NATO through Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. This issue was part of the agenda during then-Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher’s May 30-June 3, 2008, visit to Uzbekistan. After the Commander of the U.S. Central Command, General David Petraeus, visited Uzbekistan in January 2009, the country reportedly began facilitating the transit of U.S. non-lethal supplies to Afghanistan. A first rail shipment of U.S. non-lethal supplies departed from Latvia and entered Afghanistan in late March 2009 after transiting Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan. President Karimov announced in May 2009 that the United States and NATO had been permitted to use the Navoi airport (located

³² U.S. Department of State. *Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Annex: Regional Perspectives*, FY2012, April 8, 2011.

³³ International Institute of Strategic Studies. *The Military Balance*, March 7, 2011; Deirdre Tynan, “Uzbekistan: Tashkent Tries to Stuff Termez Genie Back in the Bottle,” *Eurasianet*, August 4, 2011.

³⁴ “U.S. Military Returns to Ex-Soviet Uzbekistan,” *Agence France Presse*, March 6, 2008; “Only Germany Can Use Uzbek Bases Now,” *United Press International*, December 13, 2005.

between Samarkand and Bukhara in east-central Uzbekistan) to receive non-lethal supplies, which could then be transported by air, rail, and ground to Afghanistan. In August 2009, General Petraeus visited and signed an accord on boosting military educational exchanges and training. Reportedly, these visits also resulted in permission by Uzbekistan for military overflights carrying weapons to Afghanistan. President Karimov hailed the visit by General Petraeus as a sign that “relations between our states are developing further. In the fact that we are meeting with you again I see a big element of the fact that both sides are interested in boosting and developing relations.”³⁵

Among other security-related visits, in November 2010, U.S. Central Command Commander James Mattis visited Uzbekistan, where he signed a military cooperation accord with General-Major Kabul Berdiyev, the Uzbek Minister of Defense, on engagements and training between USCENTCOM and the Ministry of Defense to be held in 2011, a follow-on to the accord signed in August 2009. In early May 2011, the State Department’s U.S. Negotiator for Nuclear Security and Dismantlement, Michael Stafford, visited the Uzbek foreign ministry to discuss joint non-proliferation efforts. In late May 2011, Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough met with President Karimov to discuss Uzbekistan’s assistance to Afghanistan. In early July 2011, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Kurt Amend visited Uzbekistan. His specialties include defense cooperation and status of forces negotiations.

Figure I. Map of Uzbekistan



Source: CRS

³⁵ Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report* (hereafter *CEDR*), August 18, 2009, Doc. No CEP950264; July 14, 2009, Doc. No. CEP-950075.

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