

DEMOCRACY IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

JOINT HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AND
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPER-
ATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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CONTENTS

WITNESSES

	Page
Donald L. Pressley, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, U.S. Agency for International Development	5
Dr. Martha Brill Olcott, Senior Associate, Carnegie Endowment for Inter- national Peace, and Professor of Political Science, Colgate University	15
Mr. Paul Goble, Director of Communications, Radio Free Europe/Radio Lib- erty	21
Ms. Cassandra Cavanaugh, Researcher, Human Rights Watch	25

APPENDIX

Prepared statements:

Mr. Donald L. Pressley	42
Dr. Martha Brill Olcott	54
Mr. Paul Goble	71
Ms. Cassandra Cavanaugh	78
The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, a Representative in Congress from New Jersey	82
The Honorable Dana Rohrabacher, a Representative in Congress from Cali- fornia	83

Additional material:

A letter to Secretary of State Madeleine Korbelt Albright submitted to the by Hon. Christopher H. Smith	86
Documents submitted to the record by Ms. Cavanaugh	91
A statement for the record submitted by Hon. Eni Faleomavaega, a Delegate from American Samoa	85

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AND THE PACIFIC, JOINT WITH THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON
INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS,
COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS,

Washington, DC.

The Subcommittees met, pursuant to notice, at 1:30 P.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Doug Bereuter and Hon. Christopher Smith [Chairmen of the Subcommittees] presiding.

Mr. BEREUTER. The Subcommittees will come to order. I am going to proceed with an opening statement, assuming that the Ranking Democrat Member, Mr. Lantos, will be here shortly, and in order to expedite the process today, I will begin.

The Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee meets today together with representatives of the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights in open session to receive testimony in the progress toward democracy in the Central Asian Republics, after which we will move to a markup of H. Con. Res. 295, a resolution regarding Vietnam's human rights and political opposition which was introduced by Mr. Rohrabacher and many of our colleagues.

In March of last year, the Asia Subcommittee held a hearing on the challenges facing U.S. foreign policy in the Central Asian Republics. Today's hearing will examine how U.S. policy has been implemented and the effectiveness of our efforts to bring democracy to a region that has a history of authoritarian rule.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, five independent states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—rose in Central Asia. The desert's mountain steppes and river valleys in this region are home to 50 million people. State borders which were imposed by Stalin artificially partition and breed resentments among various large ethnic groups, principally the Russians, Uzbeks, and Tajiks.

Long-term uncertainties and incomplete understanding of the region, uneven political and economic progress in the five republics, other global exigencies, and, I believe, indecision regarding the real import of U.S. interests vis-a-vis other priorities have resulted in a largely fractured U.S. policy toward the region and the relegation of these states to a policy backwater.

However, America's relative inattention to Central Asia, I think, appears to be slowly changing. At the end of this week, the Secretary of State embarks on her first trip to the region.

The Central Asian states are at a critical juncture in their political and economic development, balanced between democracy and authoritarianism, between free market economy and systemic corruption, between cooperation with or resistance to the West. In short, the region is poised between merging into or retreating from the Free World.

Of all of the Soviet republics, it is certainly arguable that those in Central Asia were least prepared for independence. Indeed, each state today still faces three fundamental challenges. First, they must forge a shared national identity from a legacy of intermingled ethnic and religious groups and convoluted borders.

Second, the Central Asian republics must institutionalize both at and below the national level political and legal structures and attitudes that are compatible with democracy.

Third, they must create a free and open economic system, a radical departure from the Soviet past.

Unfortunately, Central Asia appears to be moving along the path of authoritarianism. While in recent months each of the five countries have conducted general elections, these elections varied in the degree of electoral freedom, however, in no case did any of these elections adhere to internationally accepted norms. Indeed, most remained reminiscent of Soviet-style elections.

The world has witnessed the decertification of opposition parties and, in some cases, the apprehension of opposition leaders. The State Department's current reports on human rights practices for 1999 concluded that Presidential power in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan overshadows legislative and judicial powers, and that Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan have lost ground in democratization and respect for human rights.

This continued decline is very disturbing and raises questions about the ability of the United States to successfully encourage true democratic institutions and the rule of law in the region.

It is primarily for this reason that I have scheduled this hearing. This is not a human rights hearing, yet fundamental human rights are a key component of any progressive democratic country.

We look forward to testimony which will address not just the current state of democracy in the region, but what, in the witness' opinion, the Federal Government and the Congress can do to reverse these negative trends that are so prevalent in the Central Asian republics.

I would tell our witnesses that the Subcommittee comes to this hearing with no specific prescriptions. The purpose is not to focus criticism on the Administration for any particular action it may or may not have taken. Rather, this is part of our duty to conduct our congressional oversight responsibilities where the executive branch's efforts are not yielding the desired results. It is simply that Central Asia has been too long neglected or ignored.

This hearing seeks, in part, to remedy that shortcoming and begin to put American foreign policy for the region on a more appropriate course.

The Subcommittee is privileged today to have two excellent panels of experts on Central Asia. Testifying for the Administration is Mr. Donald Pressley, Assistant Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development for Europe and Eurasia.

A career Foreign Service officer, Mr. Pressley has served the Agency for International Development in a number of capacities in a career that has extended over 25 years. Mr. Pressley is uniquely positioned to explain how the United States has sought to promote democracy in the region, where we have been most successful and where we have failed.

Mr. Pressley, I am particularly interested in your assessment of what the impact of the passage of the so-called "Strategy of 1999" has had on U.S. policy toward the Central Asian region. I imagine, since it was passed so recently, it will be relatively small, but perhaps you could give us an indication of what you expect.

We are also honored to have a second panel of imminently qualified witnesses. I am also pleased then, therefore, to introduce Dr. Martha Olcott. She is a Professor of Political Science at Colgate University. Dr. Olcott is a specialist in Central Asian affairs and inter ethnic relations in the Soviet successor states, and a Senior Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Dr. Olcott co-directs the Carnegie Moscow Center's Project on Ethnicity and Politics in the former Soviet Union. As such, she organizes seminars, conferences and publications on the ethnic conflicts in the Soviet successor states and on regional conflicts within Russia. It is my understanding that Dr. Olcott has only recently briefed Secretary Albright regarding her upcoming visit to the region.

Next, Dr. Paul Goble, Director of Communications and Technology at Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Earlier, he served as a Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Special Advisor for Soviet Nationality Problems and Baltic Affairs at the State Department, Director of Research at Radio Liberty, and Special Assistant for Soviet Nationalities in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Dr. Goble has appeared before the International Relations Committee before on a number of occasions, but this is his first appearance, I believe, before the Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific.

Finally, Ms. Cassandra Cavanaugh served on the staff of the New York office of Human Rights Watch where her responsibilities extended to the Caucasus and Central Asia. Ms. Cavanaugh is a doctoral candidate at the Columbia University, and has previously served as Program Officer for Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for the International Research and Exchange Board.

As is consistent with the policy of the Subcommittee, in both panels, your entire statements will be made a part of the record, and we will appreciate if you could proceed in approximately 10 minutes or so. You may read or summarize your presentations as you see fit.

I would turn next to the Ranking Member from California, but he is not here at this point. He will be joining us as soon as possible. We do have another Californian here, a senior colleague on the Subcommittee, Mr. Rohrabacher of California. Do you have any opening comments?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I will make it short, but when you said Ranking Member from California, I thought I had been both promoted and demoted at the same time.

I have spent considerable time in this part of the world, and I frankly am disappointed at what has happened in these last 8 years. I think that what we have now in Central Asia is opportunity lost and, if not lost, almost lost.

Obviously, the people on the scene did not take our admonitions about free elections and human rights seriously because they have all slipped back into their old ways—if not all the way back, at least they are going in that direction. That is what it seems from a distance. I am looking forward to your testimony on this.

But the last round of elections in the region were insulting. They were insulting to us who have tried to work with the various governments in the region to try to establish personal rapport with some of the leaders and, instead, for lack of a better word, they “shined” us on, and it was a total disregard for honesty and the basic fundamentals of democratic and free elections.

This area will not prosper and it will not live in peace if it does not have freedom. If there was anything we learned during the Reagan years, it is that freedom and peace go together, and if you have despots continue to dominate these countries that have such incredible potential, you will not have the prosperity and the stability which we seek for the region and which the people there have longed for, for so long.

One last element is, of course, the element of Afghanistan, which I think, if you take a look at that map, the entire Central Asia is pivoting right there on Afghanistan, and I will renew my charge that there has been a covert policy by this Administration of supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan despite their brutality and their violations of the rights of women, despite the fact that they harbor terrorists. This Administration has refused to give me the documents necessary to prove or disprove this charge, but in the documents, Mr. Chairman, that I have examined, there has already been clear evidence that the charge that I made was accurate and yet they still kept away from my office the records of 2 full years of communications, which are the central years that I have been asking. For several years now I have been making this request as a senior Member of International Relations Committee. They have kept those documents from that time slot away from my office and prevented us from doing the oversight we feel is necessary.

With a regime in Afghanistan like the Taliban—anti-Western, making hundreds of millions of dollars off the drug trade, involving the training and base areas for terrorists—that is a destabilizing force for the whole region, and this Administration, I think, bears full responsibility for whatever deals it has cut with whichever powers, whether they be Pakistan or Saudi Arabia or whoever the deal was cut with for this Taliban policy. The historians will note that it is this Administration’s fault for cutting such a corrupt deal.

So, with that said, I look forward to your testimony as to the status quo, and some predictions about what is going to happen in the future there in Central Asia.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Rohrabacher.

As we begin, I should explain that I am involved in a contentious markup in the Banking Committee that is going on simultaneously, and if I leave here abruptly it is only to go cast a recorded vote and I will have to turn it over to Mr. Rohrabacher or someone else.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Then you are really in for it.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Pressley, we are very pleased that you accepted our invitation to testify today. You may proceed as you wish.

STATEMENT OF DONALD L. PRESSLEY, ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR, BUREAU FOR EUROPE AND EURASIA, U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)

Mr. PRESSLEY. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Rohrabacher, thank you for inviting me here today to discuss USAID's efforts in democracy-building in Central Asia. I have submitted my prepared testimony for the record and will just summarize my remarks.

Without question, promoting democracy in the five Central Asian Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan is one of the most difficult challenges USAID faces in Europe and Eurasia. Still, the difficulty of the challenge should not deter us—I am sure that you agree that democracy in and of itself is a worthy goal. In Central Asia, it is also of particular important to U.S. national interests.

Mr. Chairman, 2 years ago, I testified before this Subcommittee on the then-pending Silk Road Strategy legislation, which authorizes support for the economic and political independence of the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

I said then, and it is just as true today, that the overarching goal of U.S. foreign policy with regard to the five republics is to promote stable, democratic, market-oriented development, so that these independent states are able to prevent conflict and the expansion of global threats, and to ensure fair access to the region's substantial oil, gas and mineral resources.

Moreover, we continue to believe that as these countries become more democratic and prosperous, commercial opportunities will increase, and we expect inclinations toward civil strife, and arms and drug trafficking will decrease. Widespread citizen participation in the economic, political, and social aspects of these societies is fundamental to achieving and maintaining such democracy and prosperity.

Unfortunately, there have been mixed results in achieving the laudable goals of the Silk Road Strategy. Transition to democracy and open markets in the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union has proven to be a very complex undertaking.

Democratic progress has been uneven, at best. People, used to fearing their government, do not yet trust it.

While civil society and the nongovernmental sector are growing, there are still no guarantees of freedom of speech and association. There are still insufficient transparent and democratic processes to support the rights of citizens as opposed to suppressing the rights of citizens.

Parliamentary and Presidential elections in each country have been severely flawed. Electoral institutions, such as they are, have not contributed to democratic reform in a substantial way. This situation is exacerbated by pervasive corruption and the widespread

abuse of human rights. Even so, we still believe U.S. assistance programs can accomplish significant results.

Past experiences in Bulgaria and Romania and more recent events in Slovakia and Croatia tell us that grassroots initiatives can create a demand for reform.

The most important aspect of our strategy for Central Asia is an increased emphasis on individuals and communities and the institutions that nurture and serve them. We are working hard to instill democratic skills and practices in local organizations and governments. We are trying to reach the younger generation through civic education.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, as Mr. Rohrabacher has just pointed out, the human rights records of the Central Asian governments are poor, especially those of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Therefore, our work with human rights NGO's emphasizes developing the skills to fight for increased government accountability. For instance, we share information on international human rights norms in NGO civic education classes, and we educate women in their legal rights.

Corruption is another deep-seated problem in Central Asia. USAID's approach to combating corruption is primarily "bottom up", i.e., starting with citizen awareness and participation and working up to someday hope for real policy change. It cuts across all sectors of assistance. Our primary thrust is to introduce the modern concepts of accountability and transparency. These two concepts, of course, go hand-in-hand with democracy.

On page 6 of my written statement, I note more specifically what we are doing in this area. But, basically, within our modest means, USAID's efforts to address corruption in Central Asia are broad and multifaceted, befitting the depth and pervasiveness of the problem. As with so many other aspects of our program, it is a long-term endeavor.

USAID's core strategy in democracy-building includes strengthening the political process, and civil society, promoting an independent media and, as I have said, making governments more accountable to the people. But our other work in economic reform, enterprise development, health care, et cetera, also has the impact of fostering democratic values and practices. For example, a micro-credit council learns organization, consensus-building, accountability through voting, leadership skills and other important skills that are integral to a functioning democracy. Local water associations or self-regulating organizations also incorporate all the elements that open people's eyes to what it really means to function as a democracy.

While there is clearly much more to do, at USAID we are proud of what our programs have been able to accomplish despite the many challenges we face in Central Asia. On page 8 of my written statement, I have included several examples. But for now let me just say that civil society is growing in magnitude and sophistication in all five countries, with citizens' organizations now numbering over 3,000. Over 100 independent TV stations have increased the professional quality and quantity of news reporting. Local governments, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are learning to be more responsive and accountable to their citi-

zens. All types of groups are organizing and solving problems locally. People are learning about their rights and developing the skills to take appropriate action. These are the building blocks for change. These activities are creating a culture for democracy.

Mr. Chairman, as I have indicated, USAID is making headway in supporting civil society in Central Asia. But we must be realistic. This is a tough place to work. The dismal human rights records of this region underscores the autocratic nature of these governments; corruption levels suggest how little respect there is for the rule of law. Change in Central Asia is a long-term process as these countries are still grappling, as you noted earlier, with the realities of being new nations while simultaneously addressing the basic issues of development—poverty, declining health standards, and a lack of economic growth.

Still, this region is important to the United States and, therefore, it is important to stay engaged. Our experience tells us it is worth the effort. The grassroots approach embodied in the USAID assistance strategy is making a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. Progress comes one step at a time, but in the end we believe true reform will arrive. Until then, we must keep working.

Thank you, and I welcome your comments and questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pressley appears in the appendix.]

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you very much, Mr. Pressley. I think that, since we only have two of us here at this moment, we are going to proceed under the 10-minute rule so we can develop any kind of thought process a little bit better.

Mr. Pressley, I wonder if you would tell me, or reiterate for me for the record here, what are the primary objectives of USAID at this moment for the five Central Asian republics?

Mr. PRESSLEY. Our strategy for Central Asia focuses on four areas—broad economic growth through private enterprise development; instilling democratic values and principles and developing the NGO's, the nongovernmental organizations to set that out; working with those countries to develop their water and energy resources which are so important in that part of the world for them to develop their own economic well being; and developing at the local government level those skills and those practices that in turn should some day lead to the kind of democracy that we believe are important in that part of the world.

Mr. BEREUTER. Since we start here with no tradition or no substantial tradition of democracy and democratic participation, the later point, of course, would seem to be an appropriate place—the “bottoms up” effort in where you are starting basically with no substantial democratic tradition.

It would seem to me that ability to communicate with the population, diverse points of view would be essential. Tell me what the situation is, in your judgment, and what, if any, concentration of resources there are. Address, too, an open and uncontrolled media.

Mr. PRESSLEY. The situation with an independent media in Central Asia is quite sad, actually. We have seen in all five countries that there is interference with media, that the countries and governments still do not respect the rights of the media and do not understand the important role that they can play.

Through one of our nongovernmental organizations, Inter News, we have mounted a major program. In each country Inter News has legal advisors who are helping these media outlets to exercise the rights that they do have, and to push and advocate and urge for additional freedom of expression and the ability to work in a broad way.

Here, as in other cases, we are working with these independent media outlets so that they can develop the skills to associate among themselves, to form consensus, to speak out and advocate for change. So, we have mounted an intense program to support independent media in Central Asia.

Mr. BEREUTER. To what extent are international or locally developing NGO's active in that area?

Mr. PRESSLEY. It is still an area that is quite nascent but, as I mentioned earlier, now we have over 100 independent TV stations that are operating in the region. These are quite small and quite unsustainable, I must say, in many ways, but they are developing and we are seeing progress over the years, and we think this is in, again, an area where we should really stay the course and continue to support them.

Mr. BEREUTER. That is encouraging to hear. I have had a delegation visiting with me about the print media and the difficulties of actually getting the printing presses necessary to distribute their version of the news, their political agenda on a newspaper basis in at least one of these countries, and I suspect it is a more common problem than just one country. What do we do about the situation where they simply lack the ability to take the printed word to the population of the region?

Mr. PRESSLEY. Again, we have programs that support print media. I don't know the specific instance that you are referring to, sir, but in some ways the electronic media seems to be the area where we have the greatest opportunity and, on balance, we have emphasized our programs more with radio and TV because of the widespread ability to get out to the rural areas that those two approaches have. So we have put the relative emphasis on those kinds of programs.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Pressley, moving to another area, one of the things we hear from these governments and people in those countries is the urgency of having foreign, especially in American investment in the region. But so many American and foreign firms have had difficulty with the violation of the contracts in very obvious and costly ways.

With corruption so endemic in the region, do you think there is some way to effectively convince countries—and I will just say Kazakhstan is one where we have a particular problem—and to understand that what they do and how they treat foreign firms, including American firms—which has a big impact on the willingness of other firms to make investments—and to establish an ongoing trade relationship? What do we do. Do we condition aid in any fashion? How do we get the point across? It seems like we are not having much success with the normal kind of discussions and negotiations.

Mr. PRESSLEY. Actually, the level of assistance that we are able to provide to Central Asia is quite small in terms of their econo-

mies and the areas that they are focusing in. Kazakhstan, as a prime example, is very interested in the oil wealth that it potentially has and is working with American companies in that sector, and so in some ways, being open to private investment in the oil sectors where they are focusing most of their attention. I honestly don't think conditioning the kinds of levels of assistance that we are able to provide will work very well there.

Mr. BEREUTER. Would it be more appropriate, if we decided to do this, to focus on resources from some of the multilateral institutions because we don't have that much involved ourselves—the IMF, for example, the World Bank in particular?

Mr. PRESSLEY. Throughout this region, we have worked very closely with the IMF and the World Bank to come up with appropriate conditions that do make sense for those multilateral organizations, and I think that is an area where conditions do make sense and where you have the kind of government and government programs that you get the leverage that you are looking for.

If I could just continue, one of the lightning rods that we have supported is the Central Asia-American Enterprise Fund which is investing in these countries, and it has been a tremendous struggle, but through its struggles we have learned where the points of interface and problems are, and we have been able to go back to these governments and to urge the kind of policy change that would allow the Enterprise Fund to try to attract more investment and to try to operate better.

Out of the five countries, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have the best opportunity for that. We have been virtually unable to operate in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in a way that really makes sense. So we are trying to focus in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, but even there it is a tough environment for American investment, and the Enterprise Fund stands out as an example of where Americans are trying to use actual investments to make policy change.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Pressley, I want to mention at this point that I would like to ask about an opposition leader in Kyrgyzstan. I think you are not the right person to address this to, but a man named Kulov was actually apparently taken from a hospital room and imprisoned. I am going to ask the State Department to give us an account of that.

My final question is an open-ended one for you, Mr. Pressley, and that is if you could make a change or give an additional priority to a particular program that is aimed at our broad agenda of promoting democracy, rule of law, and human rights in that region, what would you recommend to the Congress? What changes would you like to see made?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I believe that we do have the best opportunity in the grassroots approach in the civil society work. If I could emphasize the role that nongovernmental organizations play in that part of the world, that is where I would put the emphasis.

It doesn't require necessarily a lot more funding because there is an absorptive issue here and you have to take it step-by-step. But in terms of the support that the Congress gives to the work that USAID and the U.S. Government is doing, I think your acknowledgement that it is a long-term issue, that grassroots does make

sense, would be very helpful to us as we deal with those governments and continue to push for allowing that kind of civil society to grow and foster in that part of the world.

Mr. BEREUTER. My red light has not come on yet, so I want to ask you, to what extent the European Union is putting in aid now as compared to our own and your own impressions, and to what extent we coordinate our effort?

Mr. PRESSLEY. The European Union has not focused very much on Central Asia. I work very closely with the European Union's assistance program in this part of the world, it is called TACIS, and I was just in Brussels 3 weeks ago meeting with the Director of this organization, and they do have programs there and we do coordinate but, relatively speaking, they are focusing much more on Central Europe and the countries that are closer to accession into the European Union. So once again, the United States is the donor, is the country that these countries are looking to for assistance and support and helping them make these changes.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you. The gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher, is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much. Let us talk a little bit about China and Russia's influence in this region, and as we know that this was the area where a century and a half ago they used to call it the "playing field of the great game", Britain and Russia seeking influence.

Is Russia now engaged in trying to dominate these former territories that it has dominated for the last 70 or 80 years?

Mr. PRESSLEY. Mr. Rohrabacher, I am probably not the best witness to speak definitively on Russia's intentions. I can tell you that from my perspective of seeing the assistance activities that are carrying out in Central Asia, that Russia remains very engaged in this area, it regards it as an area that is of extreme importance to its own national interest.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Do you see Russia as a positive force or negative force?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I think that there an attempt to be sure to continue the domination of these countries because it has been such an important part of their economy. I have seen, for example, that as Kazakhstan is talking about joining the WTO, they are very nervously watching what Russia is doing and trying to get guidance from that, and trying to understand the impact this would have on their economy. That is only understandably so, from my perspective.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The people I met from the region, a lot of them believe that Russia is engaged in destabilizing the region intentionally. Would you say that the Russians, for example—one example I have always heard is that they are trying to keep the war going between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Is there any validity to that, do you think?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I am not aware of any validity to that. That might be a question I could take back to the State Department with me. We have the contact group, the Group of Five, that have been working to resolve—help resolve the issues between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Russia is a member of that group, and the reports that I get from our representative on that group is that there is coordi-

nated effort to try to resolve those issues. But, as I say, I may not have the full information on that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Is there Chinese immigration evident in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, perhaps Tajikistan?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I cannot answer that question. I would be happy to take it for the record and check with my colleagues in the State Department on this.

[This information was not submitted at the time of printing]

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Two years ago when I visited the region, there were complaints in Kazakhstan, in particular, that there seemed to be an intentional illegal immigration of Chinese Nationals into the country, and you haven't seen any evidence of that?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I have not seen that.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right. The Uzbeks seem to be, just from my perspective, more sophisticated in their leadership. Of the various leaders I met in the region, Karimov and his group seemed to be much more sophisticated and even pro-Western than the others who I met, especially this guy from Turkmenistan, the guy who has his picture all over the place, with the big hat on and everything. That is really strange.

Mr. PRESSLEY. Niyazov.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. But even in Uzbekistan where they seem to be sophisticated and pro-Western, in the last elections they let everybody down. In Uzbekistan, they are very suspicious of Russians. Their rhetoric has been certainly pro-Western. So, for people who seem to understand, have an understanding, they seem to be sophisticated, yet they make a travesty out of the electoral process. How do you explain that?

Mr. PRESSLEY. As we mentioned earlier, these are new nations. These are leaders who had not come from any sense of change. They are former Communist leaders who—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All of them are. Are we just going to have to wait it out for a generation or two, for all these people to die off either naturally or otherwise?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I certainly hope not, but we are going to have to work away at the citizen level, and work with these nongovernmental groups that I have been talking about.

I think that the leaders of this region feel that they are under a variety of pressures, including those coming from Afghanistan and other parts, that lead them to believe incorrectly that they need to maintain that "iron fist", that they need to be in charge and not let people speak out against them, and not allow the kind of dissent that is so healthy.

So, I think it is going to have to come up from the bottom, and that is where we are working.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. From what you have said, I take it the National Endowment for Democracy and other of our pro-human rights institutions in the United States have been active in the region and have done a fairly good job, from what you can see?

Mr. PRESSLEY. Yes, that is right. I can't speak specifically to the National Endowment for Democracy in this part of the world, although they are working in this region more broadly. But I think that there are a variety of human rights groups that have had pro-

grams there, and we have supported them, and we think they are doing the right thing and are trying their best.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You agree with my assessment that unless there is some kind of change in Afghanistan, that it will continue to be a source of instability for the region as a whole?

Mr. PRESSLEY. I do.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, for the record, I am very deeply disappointed in this last 8 years. I really believe that if we would have been more forceful in that region, we could have had more progress toward a truly democratization; instead—and I have met almost all of these leaders, and some are more sophisticated, like in Uzbekistan, and others are less sophisticated perhaps, like in Kazakhstan or in Turkmenistan, but whatever their level of sophistication, they seem to have not made the progress that we felt was potential 8 and 10 years ago and, without that success on the political end, we are not going to have the economic success that we all know is the potential of Central Asia.

So, thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. I agree with your assessment.

The gentleman from South Carolina.

Mr. SANFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I might, I am gathering a few thoughts, would the gentleman from New Jersey like to go? If not, I will go, but—

Mr. BEREUTER. I am pleased to yield to the Chairman of the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee, the gentleman from South Jersey?

The gentleman from New Jersey, who Chairs the International Relations Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I thank Mr. Pressley for his testimony and regret that I was not here earlier. I was one of the speakers at the rally on PNTR and had to wait my turn, and finally got up there and it set me back time wise. So, I do apologize for not hearing your testimony.

I would like to make a very brief opening statement and then submit some questions to our very distinguished witness.

I am very pleased that we are able to conduct this joint hearing on the state of democracy in the Central Asia Republics. As you know, Mr. Chairman, I introduced last fall, H.Con.Res. 204, voicing concern about the serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in most states of Central Asia.

Much has transpired in the region since the time of introduction, and I am eager for us to schedule a markup and Floor consideration on the measure as soon as we return from the Easter recess.

As we all know, the Secretary of State is traveling to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan in the coming days, and members of the Helsinki Commission, which I chair, joined me just recently in sending a letter to the Secretary of State urging her to raise a number of very specific human rights and democratization issues in her talks with authorities in the region, and I would ask that that letter be made a part of the record.

Mr. BEREUTER. Without objection, that will be the order.

[The information referred to appears in the appendix.]

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. In general, the state of democratization and human rights in the countries of Central Asia is a source of serious concern, frustration and disappointment.

Over the past year, the Commission has conducted a series of hearings on the countries in the region. The five newly independent States of Central Asia were admitted to the OSCE in 1992, after freely accepting all commitments contained in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents.

Let us not forget that each of the leaders, having signed the OSCE documents, have personally acknowledged "democracy is the only system of government for our Nations", and committed themselves to foster democratization by holding free and fair elections, to promote freedom of the media, and to observe human rights.

Some 8 years later, these countries remain independent sovereign entities, but in much of Central Asia the commitments have been slighted. Central Asian leaders give every indication of intending to remain in office for life, and Western Capitals, though dutifully pressing their leaders to observe OSCE commitments, seem to have accepted this unpleasant reality as unalterable.

Throughout the region, fundamental freedoms are ignored while leaders entrench themselves and their families in power and in wealth.

Mr. Chairman, the deterioration of democracy, the lack of the rule of law, and the violations of human rights seriously jeopardize genuine stability in the region and are contrary to U.S. interests. I would strongly suggest that our interests could only be advanced through the promotion of democratic principles where officials are accountable to the electorate and justice is administered impartially.

I want to thank you again, and I look forward to our second panel, and I will, again, Mr. Pressley, read your statement very carefully. Yield back.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you very much, Chairman Smith.

Is the gentleman from South Carolina prepared to proceed? The gentleman is recognized.

Mr. SANFORD. I was looking through notes—and, again, I apologize for being late as well. I would simply say this, I guess I have two questions—one on the role of Islam in the region. What are your thoughts on radical Islamic faith versus not? Is that increasingly becoming a problem point? If you already covered this in your testimony, just say so.

The second question I would have would be exactly how much do we give in aid to that region, because I missed it, and it may be in your notes.

Mr. PRESSLEY. Thank you, sir. On your first point, I did not talk about the role of Islam. Central Asia has a form of Islam that varies across the countries, and we have seen in some countries that there is a great comfort level there, if you will, with that religion. In others, there is considerably more tension. Tajikistan, for example, unfortunately, is an area of civil strife, and the various warring factions that are there are influenced by their various views on religion.

As we mentioned earlier, there are radical elements of Islam that are very interested in expanding their role and influence and con-

trol in this part of the world, and the leaders of these countries are quite determined to keep that radical element out.

So, it is an area where unfortunately this major religion is being used by various groups for their own means and devices, and they are using this as a way to stir up the people, and it has caused both unrest and great conflict in this region.

In terms of the budget, if I could just put this in perspective, the level of assistance that was appropriated under the FREEDOM Support Act that covers the NIS, over all the years that we have been there is approximately \$7.5 billion. Out of that, we have allocated approximately \$900 million to the Central Asia Republics.

Mr. SANFORD. For some reason, I thought it was more in the neighborhood of like \$400 million a year that was going to—us that the neighborhood, or that is high?

Mr. PRESSLEY. That is high. For Kazakhstan, in this fiscal year, the amount allocated for USAID programs is \$27 million; Kyrgyzstan is approximately \$21 million; Tajikistan is \$7 million; Turkmenistan is \$4 million, and Uzbekistan is \$9 million.

Mr. SANFORD. So I am mixing up former Soviet republics to the east when I get to that. Yes. If you look at the configuration of the presidency, in essence, for instance, in Kazakhstan, as I understand, power is very centrally located in the executive branch as opposed to other branches of government. Is America getting a good return on—in essence, you have a king over there, as I understand. Is that not the case?

Mr. PRESSLEY. You have a very authoritarian government, there is no doubt that. We have seen that elections are severely flawed, and that power remains very heavily centralized.

Our approach to deal with that issue, as I mentioned earlier, is to work at the grassroots, to promote civil society, to promote citizens' awareness, to cause them to understand the benefits of democracy and want to advocate for change themselves. This is a long-term strategy but, as we have all indicated, over the past 8 years we have been disappointed in the level of reform and the movement toward democracy, and we think this kind of grassroots approach has to be the one that will pay off for us in the end.

Mr. SANFORD. I am burning through my time, but you would say that that \$23 million a year that the taxpayer is sending, for instance—and I am not picking on Kazakhstan other than the fact that you mentioned it, you could pick each of the different countries—but you would say that could be an exceedingly long-term investment by the American taxpayer—several generations is essentially what you are saying.

Mr. PRESSLEY. I would hope not several generations.

Mr. BEREUTER. The gentleman's time has expired.

Thank you, Mr. Pressley, for appearing here today and for your testimony.

Mr. BEREUTER. If our second panel would come forward, we are going to hear from Dr. Paul Goble, Director of Communications for Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty; Dr. Martha Olcott, Professor, Department of Political Science, Colgate University; and Ms. Cassandra Cavanaugh, Researcher for Human Rights Watch in New York City. As I mentioned, your entire statements will be made a part of the record. You may proceed as you wish. I would

like to see if you could summarize your comments in about five or 6 minutes, if possible, or give us that part that you would like to supplement your prepared remarks, and then we will move to the questions.

First, we will call on Dr. Martha Olcott, Professor at Colgate University.

Dr. Olcott, you may proceed as you wish.

STATEMENT OF DR. MARTHA BRILL OLCOTT, SENIOR ASSOCIATE, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, COLGATE UNIVERSITY

DR. OLCOTT. I apologize that I am going to have to leave after my testimony and any questions that are directly for me because I am testifying in the Senate subcommittee at exactly the same time as I am here.

Mr. BEREUTER. I understood that you were not going to be there until 3:30.

Dr. OLCOTT. They moved the hearing back to 2 and they wanted me there at 3, if I could.

Mr. BEREUTER. It is very difficult for us to intervene and have members ask questions of just you without listening the other panelists. We will see as we go.

Dr. OLCOTT. Then, am I excused to leave after my testimony?

Mr. BEREUTER. That is not too helpful to the members. We like to be cooperative with the Senate, but I believe you were scheduled to come here to the House of Representatives. We will see if we can work something out as we proceed.

Dr. OLCOTT. Because I feel really awkward, but that was the negotiation with the staff. I am sorry.

Mr. BEREUTER. Staff is not authorized to give way to the Senate. Doctor, you may proceed.

Dr. OLCOTT. I am going to summarize part of my testimony.

The Central Asian region has been a disappointing one from the point of view of democracy-building. In fact, the situation appears to grow worse with every passing year. Initially, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seemed to be making steady progress toward the development of democratic or quasi-democratic politics, but in the past 2 years the regimes in each country have become more autocratic. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have had strong man rulers from the outset. Hopes for achieving a political opening in the former case were largely dashed after the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent.

The one "bright light" is Tajikistan, where part of the opposition has been brought into government and the role of nongovernmental groups has expanded in recent years. However, the government in Dushanbe is not yet in control of this war-torn country, and leaders in neighboring states see the "victories" of democracy in Tajikistan as further destabilizing the situation in their own countries.

The main reason why democracies have not developed in Central Asia is that the region's leaders don't want them to. However, the region's rulers would like us to believe that the failure of democracy-building in the region is a good thing, not a bad one. They portray their populations as unready for democracy, politically imma-

ture, and capable of being swayed by extreme ideologies. In addition, they say that their people respect strong rulers, and as traditional Asians they are ill-disposed to democracy.

Most importantly, they argue that their neighborhood is too dangerous to allow them the risk of empowering the people. The latter explanation has become more popular over time, given the obviously deteriorating security situation in the countries in and around the region. Decisions about economic reform and political institution building are regularly subjected to the litmus test of whether policy initiatives are likely to help the government keep the peace.

Invariably, though, those in power view their continuation in office as inseparable from the cause of stability. Partly this is because they view themselves as most fit to rule, but in many cases it is also because they do not want to lose the perquisites of power. The latter has allowed these men to enrich themselves, their families and their cronies, although the abuse is varied from country to country.

For now, the population of the region generally tolerates the actions of their leaders, but this does not mean that they are unprepared for democracy, or that they will forever accept the current situation.

The level of preparedness for democratic institution building and level of public engagement on civil society issues varies dramatically from country to country. Unfortunately, many of the support structures necessary for democracy-building are disappearing in these countries with each passing year, this includes a committed elite and the institutions necessary to sustain pluralistic or democratic societies.

Decisions to restrict democratization have reduced the number of political stake holders in each of these societies. There is also an implicit relationship between political and economic reform. Economic reform also creates new political stake holders, and the pattern of economic restructuring has varied considerably. So, too, have decisions about the empowerment of traditional institutions and local governments. Thus, the potential consequences of the current failures in democratic institution building vary from country to country. There are also interdependencies throughout the region, and failures in one state can create problems in another.

These patterns of interdependency make Uzbekistan a critical nation to watch. Developments here will influence those in neighboring states.

In this regard, the political map of Uzbekistan was quite similar to that of Tajikistan, although the economic, political and social structure of the Uzbeks was more complicated than that of the Tajiks. Political unrest in Uzbekistan has never reached that same fevered pitch. At the same time, the government has pursued a highly focused campaign against secular and religious political activists.

In many ways, Uzbekistan has the most thought-out model of state-building in the region, although it is far from clear that it is able to meet the challenges that this state faces. Karimov has looked to institutionalize a system where there is a strong man on top, who chooses regional rulers and then allows a certain range

of autonomous action and functioning of re-empowered traditional institutions. This model is designed to create a wide range of stake holders in the regime, particularly at the local level. Key to the model is Karimov's support for the maintenance of a strong social welfare net, which is designed to stimulate mass political allegiance. Local institutions are charged with the supervision of this net and this makes local officials important stake holders. At the same time, though, it allows the Karimov regime someone to blame when things go wrong.

The system, however, is directly linked to the state maintaining a certain threshold of economic productivity. While official Uzbek figures on GDP suggest that the country has not suffered the same precipitous economic decline as neighboring states, conditions on the ground tell a different story. The Uzbek government has managed to maintain a minimum standard of living across society by sharply restricting the convertibility of the national currency.

These decisions about economic reform are creating their own political risk. However, economic conditions in the country in recent years have led to the thwarting of many thousands of these potential entrepreneurs at all levels. In other words, the number of potential economic stake holders in the country has been sharply reduced, and with them the number of potential political stake holders. This has increased elite dissatisfaction in favor of meeting a perceived mass demand. It is not clear if the regime has set up the conditions necessary to meet mass demand in the future, they may simply have transferred the period of maximum political risk from the years just after independence to a period down the road.

Islamic opposition groups have been forced underground or to flee the country. The nature of religious opposition is such that anti-regime groups have been able to better position themselves than have their secular counterparts. The number of Muslim followers of fundamentalist ideologies has increased in the past several years, but it should not be presumed that all Islamic activists are potential terrorists, they obviously are not, but a serious Islamic threat now exists in Uzbekistan. Given the level of elite dissatisfaction and the continued presence of religion, religious themes are far more likely to be used as a way to mobilize popular opposition to the regime than might otherwise have been the case, and it is not beyond the realm of the possible that secular and religious opponents could make common cause.

The longer economic reform is postponed, the more difficult it will be for an alternative political elite to find an independent power base.

Kyrgyzstan. The situation in Uzbekistan has had an obvious influence on developments in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The risks associated with this permeability were clearly demonstrated in the Batken hostage crisis last summer when a group of Uzbek fighters held Kyrgyz and Japanese hostages for several months.

These actions occurred at a time when the Kyrgyz government was in the process of backing away from its commitment to democratic principles, and provided a further justification for them to do so.

President Akaev used to be an ardent supporter of democratic principles that worked well for him. Kyrgyzstan was the model in

the region, and it led to a much higher than average per capita foreign assistance in the country. However, the standard of living in Kyrgyzstan continues to deteriorate. This has made President Akaev far more unpopular. This unpopularity as well as growing corruption tied to the official family has made him very suspicious of political opposition.

At the same time it has become more difficult to complain about these abuses. Formal and informal restrictions on the press have increased, and most serious of the abuses is to the electoral system, particularly the treatment of opposition politicians, including most recently the arrest of Feliks Kulov.

Political crack down in Kyrgyzstan need not be a recipe for civil war or civil unrest, but it certainly makes a poor country poorer and more dependent upon powerful neighbors as well as a growing drug trade.

The current pattern in Kyrgyzstan is similar to that of Kazakhstan, where there has also been a crack down on political opposition and jailing of figures that contested the authority of Nazarbayev and corrupt parliamentary elections. However, in many ways, the crack down in Kazakhstan is less troubling than that in Kyrgyzstan. The problem is that the nature of stake holding in Kyrgyzstan is much more restrictive. Kazakhstan is implicitly pluralistic, given the country's enormous size, economic complexity, and ethnic diversity.

This informal pluralism is not a substitute for formal pluralism, but it does help keep alive the potential for democratic development in the absence of a supportive environment. The supportive environment is no longer present in Kazakhstan. Although economic reform has been episodic, it has been largely linear, and it has led to the empowerment of some independent economic stake holders. Regional economies are also beginning to develop. These are still too small and those tied to them too cautious to actively seek political power, but they are likely to become a force that will need to be reckoned with at the time when power begins to ebb away from President Nazarbayev.

Just a few comments about Turkmenistan. It is the most opaque of the Central Asia societies. It has an anachronistic political system, media is tightly controlled, and there is no intellectual life to speak of in the country.

In the first years of independence, when it looked like oil and gas wealth was around the corner, the peculiarities of the Turkmen political system were less troubling to potential political and economic stake holders. Now, the crack down in Turkmenistan's political life combined with the closing down of economic prospects mean that there will be no democratic institutions to be used by increasingly more thwarted political and economic stake holders.

In many ways, Tajikistan has made the most strides toward achieving a civil society, in part because a coalition seemed the only way out of the crisis engendered by the civil war. At the same time, Tajikistan has the most criminalized economy in the region, creating a state within a state. Drugs dominate in the border areas with Afghanistan, and the mayor of Dushanbe is said to meet his municipal needs by taxing the drug trade. The pervasive atmos-

phere of lawlessness in Tajikistan makes other Central Asian leaders frightened of the Tajik example.

What lessons can we draw from the past 9 years of U.S. policy? I would argue that these dismal results do not mean that U.S. efforts have been for naught. There is a tradition of independent media developing in most of the countries of the region, even if what they can broadcast is still restricted. A new generation of lawyers and other legal experts is receiving training, and with time they should be able to provide a more forceful lobby for the need for legal reform. The number of people with formal training in business and economics is also increasing, and they too seem certain to push for the need for legal reforms in the area of protection of property. The next generation of administrators throughout the region should be better trained than the current one, and they will be able to draw on the expertise and involvement of those active in the NGO sector.

The U.S. should continue to make an investment in the human capital of Central Asia, however, we shouldn't exaggerate the influence that these training programs are likely to have. Young people with knowledge of the West are likely to make more effective interlocutors when they come into positions of importance, but they need not make better or more dependable partners for the U.S.

Thank you.

[The statement of Dr. Olcott appears in the appendix.]

Mr. BEREUTER. We are going to bend our rules and we will call on Mr. Rohrabacher for a question, and then we will proceed to the other two gentlemen for a question each.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The real trouble is that you have got every one of those countries is being run by a very strong individual who doesn't want to give up power. Am I being too simplistic there?

Dr. OLCOTT. No.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Because if it wasn't that, there is a good possibility that we would have some evolution, but we are not seeing this evolution because of the strong individuals.

Maybe a policy I suggested to Hun Sen down in Cambodia might be an idea, and that is to say if we are going to have a relationship with you, we have got to know that you are not going to try to be the strong man and the power in this country forever, for as long as you are alive, and suggested that there be a voluntary term limit agreement that these tough guys, for us to even have any relations with them, have to agree to announce that after a certain number of years—4, 8, or 10 years, whatever that is—that they will no longer be the head of their country and they will leave power. What do you think about that?

Dr. OLCOTT. I think it is a great idea, but I don't think you would find any takers in the region.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. It depends on what the price was for not agreeing to that. Certainly, if we just continue to treat them as a legitimate government—I made it very clear to Hun Sen that I wasn't going to treat him like legitimate head of state and that I would be a royal pain if he continued to act as if he was going to control that country forever. But what if our whole government was telling Hun Sen and these various dictators that and just walk away from them if they don't agree to that?

Dr. OLCOTT. I would say that as bad as these regimes are, most of them aren't on the short list of the most horrible regimes in the world, which is probably why it would be hard to totally walk away from the regimes.

The big problem is that the leaders of the countries are really greedy and the problem of official corruption is really a serious one, and they are not going to walk away easily. But I would say where the U.S. has to put its influence is to work with these people to create institutions necessary to support the inevitable political successions that are going to occur, that even though it is harsh to say we have to take the hit on the next 5 or 10 years, I think what we have to do is begin working toward the transfer of power, and to try to keep things from deteriorating even further.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Mr. Pressley recommended that we try to set up and support these alternatives from the ground up. Frankly, I don't think that the problem is with the grassroots in these societies. I think it is the other way around, and no matter how much money and effort we put in trying to convince the people to develop democratic institutions, they are ready for it. It is these tough guys that are the real problem.

Mr. Chairman, I think that is all the questions I have.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you, Mr. Rohrabacher. Mr. Sanford, one question for the Professor.

Mr. SANFORD. My one question would be regarding the number for Turkmenistan it was around \$5 million or something that we sent there. In politics, if you don't have a certain level of saturation in advertising, frankly, it is a waste of time. Are we at that waste of time level with some of these countries?

Dr. OLCOTT. Honestly, I think we are with some of them. I don't think we can make a dent in Turkmenistan's domestic politics and their decision to go back to selling gas through Moscow, I think, is proof of the fact that they have options. They may not be options we like, but I think engagement with Uzbekistan is really critical because they create a security risk for the whole region. I think engagement with Kazakhstan is really critical because I think, as I say in my formal remarks at greater length, that Kazakhstan is implicitly a pluralistic society even though it is not legally or explicitly a pluralistic society, and I think by really engaging in Kazakhstan today, we can help ensure the chance that when Nazarbayev passes from the scene, Kazakhstan will become a more attractive place to do business with. It is not lost, it really isn't.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you. Good question, Mr. Sanford.

Dr. Cooksey.

Dr. COOKSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Is it correct that most of our aid is going to Kazakhstan?

Dr. OLCOTT. I think so, yes. I think that Kazakhstan receives more monetarily and Kyrgyzstan receives more per capita.

Dr. COOKSEY. Where did you say you would place that aid, if you were to place it?

Dr. OLCOTT. I would continue with what we are doing in Kazakhstan, and even upgrade. I think the money we are spending on economic restructuring, which is really where a lot of this is going, is really having an impact. I think that economics will help lead Kazakhstan out of its political mire. It is a large, complex

country, and the degree to which they create an independent entrepreneurial class, which is beginning to be formed, I think is really the hope of the future. Unfortunately, we can't engage in the same way in Uzbekistan because their currency is not convertible. Even though I am a political scientist, I think in the long-run money spent on economics in these transition societies will contribute more. We have to keep working with the NGO's. We obviously have to keep defending human rights and human rights activists, but I think that the future of transition will really only occur if there can be the creation of a new, independent entrepreneurial class and if local governments can begin to function in a more or less quasi-pluralistic way.

Dr. COOKSEY. Elaborating on your last comment, Dr. Olcott, is there a meaningful way for American business and American businesswomen and businessmen to participate in this economic growth development that we are helping support in Kazakhstan, for example?

Dr. OLCOTT. There is, especially in Kazakhstan where the currency is freely exchangeable. The two problems with business in Kazakhstan—and I serve as one of the directors of the Central Asian American Enterprise Fund, as its Vice Chair in fact—the problem that we encounter with our investments is that the market is really still very small. That is one of the problems, how big a prize is the capture a market of only 18 million people, as Central Asia is not yet a whole single functioning economic region. The second is the dependability of contract, and the second is one I think that we can really continue to work with the Kazakh government to increase training of economic judges. I think these are all things that we really can do and where AID is really making a real and important contribution.

Dr. COOKSEY. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you, Dr. Olcott.

Dr. OLCOTT. May I be excused?

Mr. BEREUTER. Yes.

Dr. OLCOTT. I am really sorry, I apologize. Thank you.

Mr. BEREUTER. Mr. Goble and Ms. Cavanaugh, we are pleased to hear from you.

Mr. Goble, you are listed first, you may proceed as you wish.

**STATEMENT OF MR. PAUL GOBLE, DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS, RADIO FREE EUROPE/RADIO LIBERTY**

Mr. GOBLE. I am pleased to be speaking before this Subcommittee for the first time because I think it represents a major step forward—not that I am invited—but that Central Asia is being focused on by something other than the European aspect of looking through Moscow to get to Central Asia, and I want to commend you for the reorganization which, unfortunately, has not been paralleled everywhere else in this city.

The governments of post-Soviet Central Asia are producing what they say they most want to avoid—growing instability and the rise of a radical Islamist opposition. Moreover, the two more important outside actors in the region, Russia and the West, are unintentionally encouraging this process, in the first case so as to extend Moscow's influence and in the second in the name of maintaining sta-

bility, and imposing an Islamic threat which, in fact, the approach that has been adopted is producing rather than containing.

But as a result of all this, the prospects for democracy and the stability that democracy can bring in these countries in this region are now far worse than they have been at anytime since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

That sobering conclusion is one that suggests that these countries may, in fact, in the upcoming leadership transition, go in the direction of the authoritarian, anti-Westernism pursued by Iran, Algeria and several other Islamic countries. It in turn reflects the nature of the post-communist regimes in these countries, the nature of Islam as it has evolved there first under the Soviet system and now in post-Soviet times, and finally the nature of the involvement of outside powers. I would like to comment briefly on those three topics, and I have spoken more fully in my written presentation.

In his classic essay of the early 1970's, "Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?", Andrei Amalrik predicted that the countries of post-Soviet Central Asia were far more likely to continue Soviet patterns of behavior long after communist power fell than any other countries to emerge from a post-USSR environment.

He argued that the congruence, even fusion of the traditional patriarchal forms of rule with Marxist-Leninist methods would have the effect of preserving the Soviet system in important ways, and that preservation of the past, he concluded, would mean that when change did come to the region, it was likely to be more radical, more anti-Western, and hence more dangerous than anywhere else. I believe that is true.

Tragically, as so often happens to a prophet, Amalrik's words on this point have been ignored even after his fundamental prediction about the demise of the USSR proved true. Even more tragically, his prediction about Central Asia are proving to be true right now.

Overwhelmingly, as has already been noted, the Soviet-era leadership of these countries remains in place. Three of the five presidents were first secretaries of the Communist Party and the apparatus is more than 80 percent holdovers from the Communist Era. It is going to take more than a couple generations to change that because we are already watching the nomenclature reproduce itself with people accepting the values of their bosses from Soviet times because no one is being sufficiently critical of what they are doing.

What we have seen in the last few years, after a great deal of optimism in the early 1990's, is that Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev has become ever more authoritarian, and Kyrgyzstan President Asker Akayev, in whom so many placed so much hope, has become as authoritarian as anyone else. Turkmenistan cannot begin to be called a democracy; indeed, it is very difficult to speak of it as a legitimate state. Uzbekistan, the joke in Uzbekistan is that Uzbekistan did not leave the Soviet Union, the Soviet Union left Uzbekistan, and much of it has been preserved.

Still worse, the leaders of these countries have done everything they can to prevent the emergence of a genuine civil society that could simultaneously support their governments over time, and produce a new generation of leaders. Precisely because so many

people in the West have defined the emergence of NGO's as being the equivalent of the emergence of democracy, what we have seen is the restoration of a Soviet-era pattern, namely, government organized nongovernmental organizations, or "GONGO's", which can be trotted out to visiting Congressmen and others to demonstrate that somehow democracy is happening.

But to compound this problem, the leaders, compelled largely by us, have used the vocabulary and occasionally the forms of democracy, while draining both of any real content. That combination has produced a fragile authoritarianism, one that is likely to meet its demise with the passing of this generation of leaders.

Who is going to come next? Unfortunately, the post-Soviet leaders of these countries are producing their own nemesis, namely, a kind of fundamentalist Islam. Islam, by itself, does not represent a threat to either the social order or to the political arrangements in Central Asia, but Islamist politics do to both.

This paradox reflects three important things. First, Soviet policies in the region had the effect of removing the content of Islam while leaving the label as an important marker of identity, thus opening the way for its fundamental redefinition by opposition political entrepreneurs, particularly when they were deprived of the possibility of speaking anywhere else. It is truly tragic that large numbers of people in this city have accepted Russian characterizations of Muslims as being fundamentalists, when they are not even good Muslims.

I once had the opportunity to speak to President Djokhar Dudayev from Chechnya, and Mr. Dudayev told me, "Mr. Goble, I am a good Muslim, I pray three times a day". A good Muslim would know that you pray 5 times a day. But having been a member of the Communist Party since age 18, he was not totally familiar with the religion he was being blamed as a spokesman for.

Second, the post-Soviet regimes in this region have continued the Soviet practice in dealing with Islam, officializing part of it and suppressing much of the rest, which has the effect of making the suppressed part of Islam that which is most attractive to political opponents.

Third, precisely because these regimes have been able to contain most of the elements that could provide for the emergence of an independent civil society but refused to deal with Islam in that way, these governments have put themselves at risk of going the way of the Shah of Iran. In other words, if you destroy all other parts of civil society or prevent their emergence, all political opposition is just placed on Islam, and that radicalizes Islam which is more possible because of the denaturing of Islam that took place during Soviet times and is continued under post-Soviet times.

I could say a great deal more about those things. Let me only add that it is equally unfortunate that people see the Taliban of Afghanistan as threatening Moscow. The Taliban is a PASHTO-based organization. The instability related to Islam in Central Asia is generated in Central Asia, not by the Afghan model, with the exception partially of Tajikistan, because the spillover is caused only as a model, not as an export of the organizational structure. I think that is important that we get that.

What has happened and what has made it more dangerous is that all five of the regimes in post-Soviet Central Asia have sought to enlist the support of Islamic identity making it possible to talk about it even as the organizations are structured. Islam has become more dangerous, not less, but it is because of the way the regimes have behaved and the failure of the criticism of the West.

Meeting these challenges, creating a civil society which would allow for the transition from one generation of leaders to another would be difficult in the best of cases if nobody was doing anything from outside.

Unfortunately, the challenges that the Central Asian countries have been compounded by the policies adopted by the two actors who matter most. On the one hand, the Russian government is ever more interested in winning back the positions it lost in the region in 1991 by playing up to the current leaders—in other words, the Commonwealth of Independent States is routinely described as a “Club of Presidents”—and by positing threats to them so that the region will turn again to Moscow for aid. Ten days ago, the Russian government organized a meeting of Security Council Chiefs in Dushanbe to talk about the possibility of cooperation and signed an agreement where the Russians will rebuild the security agency of Tajikistan. If you think that Tajikistan is going to have an independent security organization after that, I will have to disagree with you.

But it is not only the Russian effort to posit an Islamic threat and therefore justify more repression and keep these countries from evolving in the direction of civil society, it is also the case that Western governments have generally adopted a very short-term approach supporting, or at least avoiding, too open criticism of the harshly authoritarian regimes in this region either in the name of stability or to allow for economic development, which is supposed to cure everything, or to promote geopolitical goals.

The Russian behavior is getting worse, and let me tell you that it is not just the older generation. A poll published in Moscow on Monday of this week shows that more than 50 percent of high school students in the city of Moscow—supposedly the most reformist-minded part of the Russian Federation—more than 50 percent of high school students believe that the proper borders of the Russian Federation should be those of the Soviet Union, or even more, those of the Russian Empire before 1914. So, Poland and Finland had better worry, too, in the future.

Happily, we have begun to see some more criticism of these regimes. I believe that the failure to be critical about this is a big problem. I also believe that the way in which we choose to measure how much democracy there is, counting GONGO's or only surveying elections, is problematic.

One American official in the region noted privately not long ago that the only reason people in Washington think Kyrgyzstan is more democratic than Kazakhstan is because the Kyrgyz government had not conducted an election as recently, and therefore we had not been able to see just how repressive Asker Akayev had been.

All of this—the support of authoritarian regimes in the name of temporary stability, the belief that that is enough, and that ulti-

mately something will turn up to allow there to be a reasonable transition—recalls the Western approach to the Shah of Iran, to the uncritical support of his openly authoritarian regime and creating a situation in which, when he fell, the only available force to replace him was a radicalized Islamic Ulemah (phonetic), and now we have had to deal for very much too long with a theocratic and anti-Russian tyranny.

The governments in Central Asia unfortunately are breeding Islamic fundamentalism even as they talk to us about democracy, however modified, and the historical record suggests that a failure by us or by others to speak up on this will have the most serious consequences for the people of this region and for the interests of the United States as well.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The statement of Mr. Goble appears in the appendix.]

Mr. BEREUTER. Thank you, Mr. Goble, your comments are always interesting, worth waiting for.

Next we would like to hear from Ms. Cassandra Cavanaugh, from Human Rights Watch. Thank you for your patience. We look forward to your testimony. You may proceed as you wish.

**STATEMENT OF CASSANDRA CAVANAUGH, RESEARCHER,
HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

Ms. CAVANAUGH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to Chairman Smith as well, for the opportunity to testify at this hearing. Coming as it does on the eve of the Secretary of State's trip, it is a very important opportunity to review both the political development of this region, but U.S. policy over the past decade as well.

Since 1990, Human Rights Watch, which is a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization, has closely monitored human rights in the five former Soviet Central Asian republics and we have had researchers stationed in Dushanbe, Tajikistan since 1994, and in Tashkent, Uzbekistan since 1996.

Nearly a decade ago, the dissolution of the Soviet Union raised hopes that vast new areas of the globe would come under democratic forms of governance. The five states of former Soviet Central Asia have done the most, I think, to dash these hopes. Once known as countries in transition, at the turn of the new century the Central Asian states, I would argue, have largely seen their political transitions from communism completed, the transition is over, but it was a transition to authoritarianism, not to democracy.

The United States has pursued an integrated policy toward the region, correctly recognizing that democratization, economic development and stability are inseparable. Now that progress toward democratization in the region has decisively stalled, or even gone backward, the U.S. has continued to advance other aspects of bilateral relations, such as economic support and security assistance, without linking them to the third prong, to political reform. A short summary of the political developments of the past year will demonstrate, I hope, how integrally democratization and stability in the region are linked, and that they should be pursued in tandem and with equal vigor.

From 1991 to 1999, the states of Central Asia made some progress, as my fellow members of this panel have argued, in cre-

ating the outward trappings of democracy. All of the countries have elected legislatures and enacted constitutions which enshrine popular sovereignty, the rule of law and the separation of powers. All states but Kazakhstan have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Despite these innovations, substantive democratization was highly uneven, to say the least. Throughout this period, the international community waited patiently for democracy to take hold in the region, and supplied millions of dollars in technical assistance and aid aimed at building democratic institutions, as Professor Olcott has emphasized. The elections scheduled in each of the countries over the past 2-year period, however, were viewed as a test of those states' commitment to democratic reform. It is a test that all five states have failed miserably and predictably, not for lack of knowledge of democratic procedures or lack of desire on the part of the population, but, as Mr. Rohrabacher has pointed out, because the leaders did not want it.

Presidential and parliamentary elections in 1999 took place amidst coordinated government efforts to limit freedom of speech, assembly, and association, which prevented citizens from making free and informed decisions on voting day. Each government kept would-be candidates off the ballot by questionable means. Flagrantly violating their own election laws, local government authorities, which Mr. Pressley has asserted were becoming more accountable to citizens, used all means at their disposal to promote government-favored candidates, to block any opponents from campaigning effectively, and to falsify counts where necessary, as documented by local and international monitors in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the OSCE considered elections to be so meaningless as to not merit full fledged observer missions.

The elections of 1999 and 2000 occasioned massive and systematic violations of citizens' rights. But even more troubling, the consolidation of authoritarian rule in each of these states has complicated efforts to find solutions to deep social crises, deteriorating economies, and to ward off external threats that each country in the region faces.

So, briefly, I will summarize the aftermath of the elections in each of the five countries.

In Turkmenistan, the virtual one-man government of President Niazov has intensified pressure against the few frail expressions of civil society, particularly Protestant and other nontraditional religious groups. Niazov continues to jail the few remaining government critics that he has, and has presided over the removal of all term limits in order to become president for life, which raises interesting implications for the Hun Sen policy that you mentioned.

In Tajikistan, elections were accompanied by state-condoned violence. The effective exclusion of most opposition factions from the legislative and executive branches continues to threaten the fragile peace accord.

In Uzbekistan, as I think my co-panelists agree, is in many ways the most troubling case. The government blamed bombings in the capital Tashkent last year on a conspiracy of outlawed secular and religious opposition leaders. Over the course of 1999, thousands of

their supporters were arrested, tortured, and jailed. Hundreds fled the country, and some joined armed bands calling themselves the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan based in neighboring Tajikistan. In August, those bands staged an incursion into neighboring Kyrgyzstan, and are said to be planning further military actions. Only state-sponsored parties were allowed to take part in November's elections. In the Presidential vote, even the one alternative candidate, the head of the successor to the Uzbek Communist Party, admitted voting for President Karimov. Arrests of all those still accused on ill-defined charges of religious extremism for discussing ideas inimical to the government have not flagged in 2000. Violations of due process rights, vicious torture, long periods of incommunicado pre-trial detention, and sham trials clearly flaunt international human rights guarantees and are threatening Uzbekistan's stability not from without, but from within.

In Kazakhstan, the government of President Nazarbayev continues to harass and suppress the few remaining independent media outlets not controlled by the president's family. It uses criminal liable suits to close independent newspapers, and has engineered the dismissal of critical journalists using threats and intimidation. All those who take to the streets in public protest face the risk of prison.

In Kyrgyzstan, which has experienced the most dramatic regression to the most repressive practices of its neighbors, Presidential elections still scheduled for October, in advance of these elections President Akaev has imprisoned one of his leading opponents, former Vice President Feliks Kulov, and ensured that the other one will be disqualified from the ballot. Independent media and NGO's continue to be harassed, severely harassed, while demonstrators protesting electoral fraud have been arrested and beaten.

What has been the U.S. response so far. If 1999 was a test of the Central Asian countries' commitment to democracy, it was also a test of U.S. Central Asia policy.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, democracy promotion, coupled with economic development, particularly in the oil and gas sector, and security assistance has been the Administration's recipe for stability.

After the elections last year, however, the impasse in democratization has not been accompanied by a parallel slowdown in other areas of these bilateral relationships. The case of Kyrgyzstan, I think, demonstrates how this failure to maintain the linkage between all facets of U.S. policy works against the very progress the U.S. is trying to promote.

Just after the arrest of Mr. Kulov, whom I have just mentioned, one of Kyrgyzstan's most respected journalists, Zamira Sydykova, reported on her conversation with a senior Kyrgyz government official. This official, who is an advisor to President Akaev, dismissed OSCE and U.S. criticism of Kyrgyzstan's electoral violations. He gave the rationale that during the elections last year in Kazakhstan, that country was also criticized but suffered no concrete ill effects. In addition, this official cited continued U.S. aid flows to Kyrgyzstan at the same time as critical statements were emanating from the Department of State as proof that there was no consistent U.S. policy toward human rights violations in the re-

gion. Surely this reasoning must have played a role in President Akaev's decision to jail his major opponent.

We draw the conclusion that critical rhetoric alone, which I must say over the past year has been increasing from the State Department, is not sufficient to promote real change, especially when criticism is undercut by the extension of significant benefits, whether through aid, taxpayer-funded Eximbank loan guarantees, or support for international lending institutions' activity. I should say that the aid is considerable, not only the Freedom Support Act tens of millions of dollars that was cited by the previous witness, but in the hundreds of millions of dollars for Eximbank loan guarantees. Uzbekistan alone has received over \$950 million in Eximbank loan guarantees, \$250 million last year alone when it was engaged in this bloody crack down.

The U.S. must make continued economic and political support to the countries of Central Asia conditional on their introduction of real democratic reform. In this regard, we welcome the linkage between corruption and assistance which came out of report language from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last Friday, on the Technical Assistance Trade Promotion and Anti-Corruption Act. We would even welcome this language becoming statutory and its expansion to address not only corruption, but other aspects of the rule of law, such as independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media, and transparency.

The current Administration, however, sadly, seems to be moving farther away from aid conditionality on human rights grounds. Military and security issues are beginning to take center stage, as the recent visits by FBI and CIA Directors to the region attest. The Secretary of State's trip to the region has been presented as the inauguration of a new expanded relationship with the countries of the region. Rumors suggest that all of the countries the Secretary will visit will be certified by the State Department to receive military assistance under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, although the Department of State itself recognizes that Uzbekistan systematically and egregiously violates its citizens' basic rights.

The sad irony is that, as many observers of the region and political scientists note, neither the thorough-going market reforms nor the external and internal stability which the U.S. aims to support with this enhanced assistance can be achieved without democratization and respect for the rule of law.

The U.S. must reject the arguments of Central Asian states requesting indulgence of their anti-democratic practices, pleading dangers of Islamic radicalism and other risks to security, because these are self-serving and counterproductive explanations. Citizens will reject the call of extremism only in societies where broad sectors of the population feel that the government is responsive to, and adequately protects their interests.

In conclusion, Central Asia's democratization and progress toward the protection of human rights is in the U.S.' best interest, not only because these are the core values of this nation, but also because democracy and the rule of law are necessary for lasting development and stability.

Human Rights Watch urges Congress to ensure that U.S. economic assistance, particularly those forums requiring consideration

of human rights grounds, such as Eximbank, will be tied in the future to genuine democratic reform in Central Asia.

Thank you.

[The statement of Ms. Cavanaugh appears in the appendix.]

Mr. SMITH [presiding]. Thank you very much, Ms. Cavanaugh, for your excellent testimony. I think, for the record, it should be known that both in my Subcommittee and I am sure Mr. Bereuter's, and in previous times with the Helsinki Commission, both of you have been invited to testify on a host of issues. I was just looking at the record, whether it be the situation in Uzbekistan last October, both of you testified on that before the OSCE on Turkmenistan. Ms. Cavanaugh, you testified just a couple of weeks ago on March 21st, and it is precisely because we so value your opinion and the credibility of your remarks that you continually get invited to appear before these Committees and before the Helsinki Commission. You really do raise a number of critical issues that are largely ignored by Congress, by the executive branch, at least by certain members of the executive branch, as we strive toward stability and a sense of glossing over or papering over certain issues.

I joined you, Ms. Cavanaugh, when your organization was crying out for withholding of that tranche to Russia because of the Chechnya conflict. Many of us saw Chechnya I coming. Paul Goble was outspoken, as was Human Rights Watch, about the miscues that led to the, what, 80,000 people who were butchered in that horrific battle or war, and Chechnya II was also on the radar screen, and regrettably there has been no penalty whatsoever imposed by the West, by the United States and by the lending institutions that you just mentioned, whether it be World Bank, IMF, or anyone else.

Wage your wars, do so with impunity—not a peep other than some rhetorical reaction from the West, and they see right through that. Money talks. It is just like one of the reasons why I was late, I was speaking out against PNTR, and reasonable men and women can differ as to whether or not that is the way to go. I happen to believe we are supporting dictatorship in our policy. They have gone from bad to worse over the last 7 years, when Mr. Clinton wisely, at first, had an MFN linkage to human rights, and if you read it—and I went back and reread his Executive Order and his speech of that day in 1993—it was a brilliant speech, a brilliant Executive Order. One year later, when they went from bad to worse, from significant progress, as spoken of in that Executive Order as well as his statement, to significant regression in every single solitary category. That sends a message to others, like in Central Asia, like in North Korea, and every other despotic or near despotic country around the world.

Just let me ask, if you would, Ms. Cavanaugh—and, Mr. Goble, you might want to speak to this as well—this issue of withholding Eximbank credits and really getting serious—it is as if these people just see us as business-as-usual types. We will say something, we will put out a very accurate human rights report—and Harold Koh, I think, does a magnificent job as Assistant Secretary for Labor and Democracy and Human Rights—and it is as if none of that

matters when it comes to implementation. There is a disconnect, as Amnesty International says over and over.

What should be done? What do you think should be Congress' role? It is as if these countries are not on too many people's radar screen, regrettably, but if you could speak to that, because I think we are at a crucial time, with the pipeline and all those other issues, and now with the prospects of military assistance to a dictatorship, that is outrageous.

Ms. CAVANAUGH. In the report language for the House Foreign Appropriations Act, there was language introduced by Congresswoman Pelosi that instructed Eximbank to beef-up its human rights assessment procedures.

At the current time, Eximbank refers projects of over \$10 million to the State Department for what its own language here is "State Department clearance", political clearance and human rights clearance.

We have requested these clearances again and again through the Freedom of Information Act, and we continue to see that with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan they are completely cursory. I have copies of them here that you are welcome to take a look at. They are signatures.

Mr. SMITH. Without objection, I would like to make them a part of the record.

[The information referred appears in the appendix.]

Ms. CAVANAUGH. I will submit them. They are completely cursory and meaningless. We feel that it would be a marvelous step forward if Congress were to mandate that Eximbank increase this procedure for examining the human rights effects of extending hundreds of millions of dollars to these corrupt and abusive states.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you. Mr. Goble.

Mr. GOBLE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Like any other country, the United States has three competing sets of interests in these countries—economic, geopolitical, and political transformation in the direction of democracy and human rights.

I am absolutely convinced that the focus on economics and geopolitics alone is counterproductive, and it is driven by a short-term approach to life. It is sometimes called in the region the policy of "stabil 'nost' uber alles", from the Russian, that the idea is that if we can just hold on for another year, another 2 years, and it will be stable.

But by failing to address the political problems—and these are structural political problems—by failing to be honest constantly with ourselves and with the governments of these countries—and that is the top of these governments where the repression is the greatest—what we are doing is creating a situation where we may have stability now, but where the coming instability will be far worse.

It is my view that the single most important thing that we can do is to first off make it very clear that we are consistent across-the-board. If people are doing bad things, they should not receive assistance. But we should also label what they are doing very clearly.

It is, I think, unfortunate in many ways that the only assessment we give of democratic process on a regular basis is when elections

are held. Delegations go in for 1 or 2 weeks and they come back and they say, technically, it was a fine election, or it wasn't.

Most of these countries know what you have to do to do it technically right so you don't get criticized too much. But if the government controls almost all of the electronic media, if it controls almost all of the print media, if it intimidates and locks up journalists as the governments of this region and across the former Soviet space do, then it is not possible to have an open democratic competition. We have seen that in the Russian Federation, we have seen that in the Caucasus, we have seen that in Central Asia, and all too often we have not labeled that behavior as anti-democratic.

We have, to my mind, been much too accepting of the idea that if there is enough economic change, there will be political change that will follow. It seems to me that if you want political change, you have to address the political questions. Economics can be a lever, but it has to be used as such. The self-confidence of some that if there is just a rising amount of economic wealth, that that by itself will produce democracy, I am afraid is not confirmed by the historical record across the world.

Mr. SMITH. Let me just ask with regards to Kazakhstan, which many of us thought was on the right track in the 1990's. President Nazarbayev has flagrantly, as you know, flouted OSCE commitments on holding free and fair elections, while his family members seized control of the country's media outlets.

With cycle of farcical elections over for the foreseeable future, we believe—and we have conveyed this to the Administration, we did so in a letter to Secretary of State Albright just recently and it was signed by Steny Hoyer, my Ranking Member on the Commission—that one of the best ways of promoting this would be a very modest move, and that would involve setting up an independent printing press.

I would appreciate your thoughts on that, and also the issue of the upcoming may round table meetings that the Kazakh officials have announced. Many of us would like to see the Kazakhgeldin as a part of that. If these things have any kind of credibility at all, an opposition leader ought to be a participant.

Ms. CAVANAUGH. Certainly, the issue promoting the independent media is the key one in this interim before elections are to come again for 5 or 7 years. I think it is wonderful that Congress is promoting this idea of creating an independent printing press in Kazakhstan. You will know that USAID supported the creation of a privately owned printing press in Kazakhstan, but privately owned doesn't mean independent because that was soon taken over by people close to Nazarbayev, and we know that it doesn't print anymore opposition or critical material after that buy out.

So, to have a printing press owned by a third party really is the only to ensure its independence in Kazakhstan. I certainly hope that the aid organizations and the Administration will find a way to do that.

With respect to the round table in Kazakhstan, I am not sure where negotiations between the government and the OSCE and various opposition groups stand on that issue right now, but I think the example of Kyrgyzstan is an interesting one.

A coalition of Kyrgyz NGO's and opposition groups just recently called on the OSCE in that country not to hold such a round table because they felt the government was using it as a way to excuse what they had done in the parliamentary elections. They felt the government was going to be able to get away without discussing the key issues on the table, and that is continued repression and actually revoking or redressing some of the fraud that went on in the elections. They felt that it would be an easy way out for the government.

I would feel that it would be important for the U.S. Government to look to what the opposition and the broad segment of the Kazakh opposition, not just one or two groups, feels about holding this round table, and make sure that it is not an easy way out for the Kazakh government as well.

Mr. GOBLE. Could I just add very briefly two thoughts? The first is that I would certainly urge—I am delighted to see the print media grow, as I tend to be a print person, no matter what—but I would tell you that I think it would be far better to invest in the electronic media.

In most of these countries, upwards of 75 percent of people get their news from radio or television because they can no longer afford to buy the newspapers. In most of these countries, people must choose between buying a loaf of bread or buying a newspaper. Guess what they choose most of the time?

The electronic media, and especially television, is the best possible way to get to these people. Increasingly, the Internet plays a role, but in the short-term it is the electronic media that is a bigger deal, and I would urge consideration of supporting that because, right now, the so-called “privately owned” media is mostly in the hands of the old party nomenklatura, or even the family members of the dictators. That is just the reality in this region. The people can count how many privately owned radio stations or TV stations there are, but the reality is most of those are owned by the old nomenklatura, or in Kazakhstan in particular, by members of Nazarbayev's family.

With respect to a round table, I am very skeptical, too, because I think it does allow these dictators to get off the hook for not allowing elections. On the other hand, round tables coupled with a constant monitoring not just by Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, but by U.S. Government officials who will then speak out could make a difference.

At present, we have essentially privatized the monitoring of what goes on in this part of the world, and if it could be re-officialized—that is, that there would be very tough statements—we have journalists beaten up, we have people being arrested for talking—talking—to Western journalists. We have people being arrested, as you said, out of their hospital room, Feliks Kulov in Kyrgyzstan. We have people disappearing, and all too often nothing gets said except by groups like Human Rights Watch/Helsinki. As important as they are, they tend to be ignored by many of these governments much of the time.

When the U.S. Government speaks, there is usually a reaction with one of these convoluted explanations of why it is justified, but

it is a different thing, it is to officialize the criticism of what is going on.

Mr. SMITH. Mr. Goble, thank you. I have some additional questions, but I will them for the second round. Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney and I have a piece of legislation that I believe now is signed into law, called "A Code of Conduct", that we are not going to be selling weapons to dictatorships, and by your analysis we wouldn't be selling—we shouldn't be selling weapons to any of these countries in Central Asia, is that correct?

Mr. GOBLE. That is correct.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. That sounds right. Is the National Endowment for Democracy and the ACYPL [Council for Young Political Leaders] are they reaching out to try to find young, perhaps more liberal, for lack of a better word, people in those countries?

Mr. GOBLE. I think that they have made some progress. I think, however, as has been pointed out before, these are extremely difficult countries to work in, and sometimes the people who were presented as options for these exchanges and these activities are, in fact, selected by the government. That is why I made reference to GONGO's. We really have the government organizing these NGO's.

The rate of exchange is not yet so massive, especially from these states, that we have been able to break through necessarily the old nomenclatura. I think there is some hope because there were some people who were fed up with the old nomenclatura system even though they were inside it.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me ask you a question. In an ideal world—I am not talking about right now because we may not even have an ideal government here in the United States in terms of the policies that we would like to see—clearly, the U.S. Government does not make human rights and democracy a priority. That is clear. This particular government and this Administration has made a mockery of that standard. I know my Democratic friends aren't here to defend the government, but that is my honest assessment. I wish it was different. In fact, when President Clinton became president, I said to myself, "well, gee, at least I am going to be able to work with this fellow on things like China and other issues where he is going to be a little bit more oriented toward human rights than George Bush was" and, boy, was I disappointed.

In an ideal world, would you have the CIA and the U.S. Government undermining dictatorial regimes like this? Would you have the CIA going into Burma and perhaps Turkmenistan and trying to find a democratic, potentially democratic clique in the military or something like that?

Mr. GOBLE. Congressman, I think that the problem with trying to do that is you sometimes end up installing people who rapidly become as bad as the people that they are replacing simply because of the way they would be installed. It requires a much broader approach to transform these societies and to transform these political leaders.

I will tell you that I am more worried about the day after these five dictators die than I am about the days now, as bad as things are, because there has been absolutely no preparation for that transition. That would create challenges, and I am afraid and—in-

deed, I believe it is Russian state policy—that when one of these leaders dies and when there is instability, that the Russian government will attempt to introduce troops in the name of peace keeping. It will be peace keeping, but they will be spelling it differently than we do.

But I would like to go back to what you said earlier about the human rights component. The human rights component is absolutely essential to American foreign policy. We have watched the citizens of a large number of the countries in the former Soviet space become something that Stalin was never able to achieve, namely, anti-American, because the perception is growing that we will support dictators, that we will support those who repress them. That is true in the Russian Federation, it is true across Central Asia. Those people were looking to the United States as the archetypical first new nation.

I had the privilege in 1991 of leading some of the leaders of the Baltic countries around this town, and I will tell you, the proudest moment in my life, in many ways, was taking the former president of Estonia to the Lincoln Memorial, Arnold Ruutel with his two Orders of Lenin. I was translating the Gettysburg Address into Russian, because that was our best common language, and the National Park Ranger came up and said to me, “What language are you speaking?” I said Russian. He said, “Are these people from Russia?” I said, “No, these people are from Estonia”. This National Park Ranger who wanted to give us a folder said, “Oh, I have heard of Estonia. It is just a little country that wants to be free”.

Let me tell you something. That kind of popular American attitude is what the peoples of this region expected from this country in 1991. When we have supported dictators, it has undercut that.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. To be fair, I think the American people still have their idealism, this idealism. I think that the cynicism found in our business community in the fact that they would make a buck off selling torture equipment to Nazis if they could, as I see, I do not find any moral standards for which our business community will not sink in order to make a quick buck, and that has only been surpassed by this Administration’s ability to just totally make a mockery of any human rights standards of other countries, and it is unfortunate.

But on the bright side, I think the American people, both Democrats and Republicans, have a love of liberty in their heart that has a side with little guys who want freedom in their countries. One prediction for this region—and, again, I agree with you folks on what is our long-term goal, we are people who promote liberty and justice and treating people decently and are against the bad guys—but in the long-run, I think that we are going to face some very strategic maneuvering around Central Asia that is very similar perhaps to what the maneuvering was a century and a half ago, only England is not going to be the player. The other player is going to be China. I would predict that within 10 years you will see a major competition going on in this region between China and Russia, and I will even go further, that I would predict that within 10 years you will see incursions by China into Kazakhstan, and that will change the whole formula. Unfortunately, this area, these people, deserve better than just being pawns in a strategic game

between huge players. They deserve like people anywhere else, to be able to control their own destiny and, if they were able to do so through the democratic process, I think the world would be a safer place because this would be less susceptible to that type of outside coercion and outside targeting.

So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you very much, Mr. Rohrabacher. Let me just ask a few followup questions. Kyrgyzstan's President Akaev, once on of the fondest hopes of reformers, orchestrated the recent parliamentary elections and demonstrated his determination to eliminate any challengers.

The recent arrest, however, of Feliks Kulov as well as the violent dispersion of demonstrators signals an attempt to intimidate society in advance of the upcoming Presidential elections.

Given Kyrgyzstan's previous record and the hopes it engendered, no country in Central Asia is more disappointing. The February-March parliamentary election made plain that the president's intention to pursue a regional pattern of falsifying and keeping non-communist parties and rivals from running against him ala Nazarbayev.

Let me just ask you on the arrest of Kulov and Uzanov, who we in the Commission have spoken out a number of times in recent days about, if Secretary of State Albright was sitting up here, not me or Dana Rohrabacher or Tom Lantos who was here just a moment ago, and Chairman Bereuter, what would you tell her about those issues, especially as it relates to—when you take a man from his hospital bed, as Feliks was taken—cardiac problems, in an exhaustion state, and the Minister of Interior scoops him up and takes him to one of their cells—what does that say on the eve of a trip of our very distinguished Secretary of State? What would you advise her in terms of when she meets face-to-face with the leadership there?

Ms. CAVANAUGH. In Human Rights Watch' letter to the Secretary of State, we supported the CSCE's call to make the release of Feliks Kulov a nonnegotiable condition of the Secretary of State's trip. We think it is a real slap in the face to the United States that Mr. Kulov was arrested on the verge of this trip being announced. It was a real throwing down of the gauntlet, just the kind of attitude that I described in my testimony, that we know nothing is going to be done, so we are going to do whatever we want.

I think it is interesting to note that Mr. Kulov, former mayor of Beshkek, former head of the MVD, former vice president, is genuinely very popular in Kyrgyzstan, and it is indicative to me that Mr. Akaev fears him probably the most because there is no opponent like someone who used to be so close to you, but obviously the trip of the Secretary is happening anyway. We seriously hope that there will be distinct and definite conditions placed on all forms of assistance to Kyrgyzstan predicated on Mr. Kulov's release.

Kyrgyzstan is a ward of the international financial institutions. Its loans and assistance from the IMF and the World Bank exceed its GDP. The kind of language that is in this bill coming out of the Senate could really place pressure on Kyrgyzstan, and I hope that it really comes to pass.

Mr. GOBLE. Since the trip appears to be going ahead, I would hope that the Secretary of State would demand to meet with Mr. Kulov publicly and make it very clear that the United States supports democracy and opposes this kind of abuse, and that is the kind of thing Secretaries of State have done, and it would be a very powerful signal if the trip is going ahead. I think you have to do that in addition to the conditionality. It is the symbolism of doing these things that are often more important given the relatively limited financial exposure we have in some places.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you again, in Kyrgyzstan, the issue—there are a number of ways you can silence your critics. You can arrest them. You can torture them. You can shut down their printing presses. You can also initiate a series of libel suits, and we know that Milosevic in Serbia used this against a number of the independent media, and we know that Akaev is using that device as well to shut down a number of the independents.

Again, in speaking to us and hopefully by amplification to the Secretary of State—because we are grateful that her representatives have stayed here—what would you say with regard to that issue, that it is not so subtle just shut down the media by suing, and by way of theft taking their ability to give an independent voice?

Ms. CAVANAUGH. You are well aware that it is happening in Kyrgyzstan, and it is happening in Kazakhstan as well. The recent case of the newspaper “Let’s begin on Monday”, they have 14 libel suits pending against them, over \$2 million U.S. dollars in damages. They will be bankrupt for the rest of their natural lives, and never dare so much as to start another newspaper again.

I think it is very important for the Secretary to express that she sees through this tactic that is being used in both of these countries, and that it does constitute—using the legal system in this way does constitute a violation, a clear violation of rights, of bilateral commitments, of international commitments, and that—again, not to be a one-trip ponier—but that there will be consequences for this.

Mr. GOBLE. I think that it is terribly important that a country which really got its start by the John Peter Zanger case in the 1750’s where the principle, the truth, was a defense against a charge of libel, should be very clear that all the laws in all of these countries—and they exist in varying form in all 12 member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States—against attacks against the president, slandering the president, where truth is not a defense under the available legal system, that the elimination of those laws should be a major item on the American agenda with these countries precisely because it is our position, going back to the Zanger case, that is at the foundation of what makes American democracy possible.

Mr. SMITH. Let me ask you with regards to Uzbekistan, President Karimov made a president to Audrey Glover, then Director of ODER—this was back in 1996—to register the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. So far, he has not done so.

Today, the society, as well as the independent human rights organization, exists through their functioning, though their function has been impaired by a series of arrests and beatings.

Again, Secretary Albright will be there. Here we have a situation where the human rights monitors—and I will never forget one of the most moving meetings I have ever had was with members of Charter 77 in the former Czechoslovakia—and when Steny Hoyer and I tried to meet with a larger number of groups, several of those people were arrested en route to our meeting. Fr. Amali came and a few other people came who were able to get through the secret police net, but others were detained.

Human rights monitors have always been the people that we have got to put the sandbags around. As a matter of fact, several of them, including Ishmael Adelov, Makubov Kasimova and Mile Kobilov have been arrested—and, again, these are the people who are the salt of the earth in Uzbekistan—and our Secretary of State is going there. She has got to demand that they be released immediately, and everyone else who has been put in prison, has been tortured due to trumped up charges. But with regards to the monitors, if you could speak to that. Again, this is a president who freely made a promise to the ODER representative back in 1996.

Ms. CAVANAUGH. The case of the human rights monitors, as you rightly pointed out, is the pivotal one. It exposes the essence of these governments' policies with clarity that is just unsurpassed in any other way.

We understand that there will be a round table so that the Secretary of State can meet with representatives of NGO's—we hope with some real NGO's, not just GONGO's—as well as the representatives of some of these unregistered human rights groups that remain unregistered to this day. But I hope that the Secretary makes it perfectly clear that she understands that there are two people missing—three people missing in this room, and those are the ones that you have mentioned. Their prison sentences of 5, 6, and 7 years, in conditions of Uzbekistan, may very well be tantamount to death sentences, and we hope that there will be the strongest pressure exerted on Uzbekistan to release these people and to live up to the commitments, as you mentioned, that they so freely made a few years ago.

Mr. GOBLE. I would add only that it is terribly important not only to seek the release of these individuals, but to demand the creation of the conditions which will allow human rights monitors to work.

One of the things that is a trap in dealing with dictators is that dictators frequently arrest people so that they can then free them and this is proclaimed a major step forward. But if there is not an additional step, which is to create the conditions under which the human rights monitors can do their jobs, what we will see is more of them will be arrested as soon as a Western leader has left the airport.

Mr. SMITH. If I could ask you with regards to religious freedom issues in Uzbekistan, while we were all happy in September 1999 when five evangelical Protestants and one Jehovah's Witness was released, Tashkent's policies have always been of concern. We raised this at our hearing recently, as you might recall.

Again, what should be the message of the U.S. Government, of our Secretary of State, when she does indeed meet with the leaders in Uzbekistan with regard to religious freedom issues? I think, Mr.

Goble, you made a very good point, you arrest people and you release them and you are supposed to get kudos for it. Don't arrest them in the first place. We have seen some very riveting testimony, or heard riveting testimony about the repression of religion in Uzbekistan, and it is very, very significant, but if you could respond.

Mr. GOBLE. I would only urge that we should raise the possibility that religious groups should not be subject registration because as long as there are subject to state registration, they can be subject to state interference.

It is an unfortunate reality of the post-Soviet states that laws on religion which were supposed to open the door to greater religious freedom, created a variety of institutions not only in Uzbekistan but elsewhere, for interference and for selective prosecution. It is precisely the fact that it is inevitably selective that it is repressive against those who are unfavored at the moment, which exercises a chilling effect on any possibility of religious freedom.

This is not just a problem in Uzbekistan, this is a problem across all 12 countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States, and it is something that has to be addressed constantly. The mistake is to demand registration because that is the beginning of the slippery slope down to control and what it is doing.

Let me just end with this one thought. The most dangerous reality that these governments are creating—Karimov of Uzbekistan, in the first instance—is by having an official church—be it official Islam, official Pentecostals, official Presbyterians, whatever—you inevitably create an underground church in all of those cases by people who are unwilling to participate in the charade of “religious registration”. Those underground groups, by shifting into that underground mode, become politicized—not only do they become victimized, but they become radicalized, and they are then in the business of trying to overthrow the government.

So, we need to explain to the governments of these countries that they are generating this time bomb under them in the name of short-term control.

Mr. SMITH. I want to thank our very distinguished witnesses, and Mr. Bereuter may have some questions as well, and just say that we are planning a hearing on Kyrgyzstan in the very near future in the Helsinki Commission, and we will do a review—especially post-Secretary of State Albright's trip—a public hearing to determine what was said, how was it said, and in keeping with our very important role of oversight. I do believe we are on the same page, but this has to be promoted not only robustly, but also with linkages because, without it, it could be “in one ear, out the other” on the part of these offending governments.

So, I want to thank you very, very much for your very fine testimony, and yield to Chairman Bereuter.

Mr. BEREUTER [presiding]. Thank you very much. There are some days when hearings don't work out, at least for the Chairman, and this was one of those days. But I very much appreciate the testimony that you have given, and the responses you have undoubtedly given to my colleagues' questions.

I think now, in light of the votes that are here and the need to move to a markup immediately, I will just express again my appreciation to both of you for your testimony. I thank you.

The joint hearing of the Subcommittees is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:45 p.m., the Subcommittees were adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

APRIL 12, 2000

**Statement by
Donald L. Pressley
Assistant Administrator
Bureau for Europe and Eurasia
U.S. Agency for International Development**

**Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
and
Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights
of the
Committee on International Relations
United States House of Representatives
April 12, 2000**

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. I welcome this opportunity to discuss USAID's assistance efforts in democracy-building in the Central Asian Republics. Without question, promoting democratic values and practices in the five Republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan is one of the more difficult challenges we face in providing U.S. assistance to Europe and Eurasia. Yet, this is an important objective, and I welcome your ideas and suggestions about USAID democracy programs in these countries.

The assistance environment in Central Asia, particularly for democracy programs, is very complex. Clearly, we have been disappointed by the lack of progress in some areas, particularly in the conduct of elections. On the other hand, we are heartened by the tremendous growth in citizen participation through community and nongovernmental organizations.

In explaining the problems and prospects for achieving democracy goals in this subregion, I would like to highlight several points:

The United States has important national interests in Central Asia: Independent states able to prevent conflict and the expansion of global health and environmental threats, as well as ensure fair access to petroleum and mineral resources, are central to U.S. foreign policy in the region.

Central Asia is starting from a weak base: these states are not only undergoing a transformation from the Soviet system, but are "new" nations and lack many of the basic attributes necessary to support democracy and broad economic growth.

Democracy is more than just elections: while free and fair elections are symbolic of democracy, other elements are also important, including civic education and activism, increased availability of information and independent media, and community problem-solving. In fact, these are the building blocks for eventual democratic elections.

Democracy is more than just democracy; economic restructuring and social transition are critical as well: development of economic and social institutions can support the growth of democracy while good governance encourages investment and promotes citizens' access to the benefits of economic and social transition.

Experience tells us it is worth staying the course: experience in other parts of the region has proven that a solid grass-roots approach produces results over time even when national leaders resist reform.

USAID has an important role to play: we have worked hard to understand the difficult circumstances surrounding political reform in this part of the world and, I believe, we have crafted a sensible approach based on grassroots organization and initiative.

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY INTERESTS

Mr. Chairman, almost exactly two years ago, I had the honor to testify before this Committee regarding the then pending Silk Road Strategy legislation. At that time, we both highlighted the importance of Central Asia to U. S. foreign policy interests.

I said then, and it's just as true today, that the overarching goal of U.S. foreign policy for the five Republics is stable, democratic, market-oriented development to prevent conflict and the expansion of global threats, and to ensure Western access to the region's substantial oil, gas and mineral resources.

Moreover, we continue to believe that as these countries become more democratic and prosperous, commercial opportunities will increase -- and we expect -- inclinations toward civil strife, and arms and drug trafficking will decrease. As the primary assistance arm of the U.S. Government with a substantial professional presence in the region, USAID plays a key role in fostering the steady development of this subregion. Widespread citizen participation in the economic, political, and social aspects of these societies is fundamental to achieving and maintaining democracy and prosperity.

A DIFFICULT ASSISTANCE ENVIRONMENT

I regret to say that there has been mixed results in achieving the laudable goals of the Silk Road Strategy.

Transition to democracy and open markets in the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union is a complex undertaking. These new nations have historically been isolated and lack any modern national experience. In contrast to many of the other transition countries in Europe and Eurasia, independence did not emerge from a popular movement for change or from a cadre of enlightened reformist politicians. Furthermore, social concerns such as high poverty rates, poor health standards, and declining education levels suggest these countries are facing a broad range of economic and social problems typically found in "developing" rather than "transition" countries.

Against this backdrop, we have all seen that progress in democracy-building has been halting, at best. There is a lack of trust between citizens and government, and there is still general citizen passivity stemming from years of domination. Recent opinion surveys across Central Asia indicate a continuing nostalgia among many for a return to the old communist system, primarily as a result of reduced living standards.

Former communist party officials still head up four of the five governments. With no national democratic traditions, and little popular clamor for reform, the leadership of the five Central Asian Republics tends toward autocratic and authoritarian modes of governance with little citizen participation. While civil society and the nongovernmental sector are growing and information is more widespread, there remains a lack of major national-level policy reforms to guarantee freedom of speech and association as well as transparent and democratic processes.

Despite claims by governments that they are dedicated to the implementation of democratic elections, successive parliamentary and presidential elections in each country have been severely flawed. The absence of true opposition parties and candidates, intimidation of voters, and outright election fraud demonstrate that electoral institutions in the subregion have not contributed to democratic reform in a substantial way. This situation is exacerbated by widespread corruption and abrogation of human rights.

These realities have not been lost on the people of Central Asia. According to a public opinion poll taken last year, a large proportion of those interviewed (78% in Kazakhstan, 52% in Kyrgyzstan, 47% in Tajikistan, and 39% in Uzbekistan) did not believe that their participation in elections at any level could change future policy in their countries. Until the governments of this subregion can demonstrate a real commitment to democratic processes, USAID is shifting its support from election administration and political party development toward civic education and participation, NGO development, and local governance.

STRATEGY FOR PROMOTING DEMOCRACY IN CENTRAL ASIA

Although the prospects for democracy in Central Asia may not appear encouraging to the casual observer, we believe U.S. assistance programs can accomplish significant objectives. USAID has learned important lessons about the timing of assistance in the development of democracy. While free and fair elections, the rule of law, good governance, freedom of the press, and an effective civil society are all essential for a vital democratic process, individual country conditions should determine where and how we focus our activities over time.

Past experiences in Bulgaria and Romania and more recent events in Slovakia and Croatia tell us that grassroots initiatives can create a demand for reform. As you know, we faced several tough years in delivering reform assistance to those countries. During that time, we refocused our programs on the development of NGOs and small entrepreneurs, and where possible, on local government strengthening. This work paid real dividends in the eventual election of reform-minded governments and a more systematic approach to transition.

The 1998 elections in Slovakia are an excellent example. Amidst growing concern that the Slovak elections would be manipulated, eleven leaders of USAID-assisted NGOs led a comprehensive civic campaign to encourage voter participation and ensure those elections were conducted in a free and fair manner. They were highly successful, and, as we know, those elections were pivotal in voting the authoritarian government out of office and putting Slovakia on a firm path to reform.

Democratic practices are more likely to advance in countries where citizens can voluntarily assemble to pursue common interests and advocate for change than in countries where this is not feasible. Establishing such an environment on a sustainable basis requires fundamental changes in attitudes, values, and behavior among ordinary citizens. We are currently going through the final review of a revised strategy for assistance to Central Asia that focuses on promoting a democratic culture in these countries.

This strategy is less centered on technical practice, and more devoted to improving public understanding of democratic practices and to changing attitudes and values. While USAID will continue to seek national policy reform where there are opportunities to do so, democracy-related activities are focused primarily at the grassroots level and stress the fundamentals: citizen understanding of basic rights and responsibilities, good working relationships between individuals and groups, local initiative and problem-solving, and effective advocacy skills.

The most important change in our strategy for Central Asia is an increased emphasis on individuals and communities, and the institutions that nurture and serve them. Instilling democratic skills and practices in how local organizations and governments function is key. We are also putting an increased emphasis on reaching the younger generation through civic education. As our USAID Mission Director in Central Asia recently stated: "this approach is the best antidote to autocracy in Central Asia."

TRANSLATING STRATEGY INTO ACTION

In practical terms, USAID provides training, technical assistance, and grants to a wide range of local NGOs representing specific interests of their constituencies. Attention is given to helping NGOs work more effectively in local communities in order to develop their services and constituency, to help them become more representative, and to enable them to learn to advocate with local governments. Separate NGO programs target different issue areas, including the environment, rule of law, human and women's rights. Other programs have helped to develop a network of independent election observers and are working to facilitate a coalition of NGOs devoted to local government reform. In some instances, USAID supports the development of NGO associations and resource centers beyond the capitals to serve organizations in rural areas generally inaccessible to international donors.

Where possible, USAID combines NGO assistance with local government strengthening to enhance opportunities for democratic and transparent local governance. Judicial and legal reform is encouraged through extensive training for judges and lawyers and the development of associations for these professions. We also think it is important to work on democratic principles

and association-building across sectors -- including health, environment, and business. Only as people experience the tangible benefits of change in their daily lives will they be willing to become more active and demand a more responsive and accountable government.

USAID has initiated innovative programs which target women and youth. Two new activities promote the full participation of women in political and civil society and increase awareness of legal rights and the ability to advocate these rights. Other new activities are emphasizing youth and civic education in the schools, including critical thinking, debates and volunteerism. This is vitally important in the Central Asia context where half the population is under 15 years of age. This younger generation represents the future voters and leaders of the subregion.

Another innovative aspect of USAID's revised strategy in Central Asia is to focus assistance on areas that hold a high potential for conflict and crisis. USAID efforts in the Ferghana valley, one of the most densely populated areas of Central Asia -- and home to some of the most traditional communities of the subregion, are an example.

With the deterioration of the former Soviet system, unemployment in the Ferghana Valley has exacerbated long-standing tensions between traditional communities and governments dominated by former communist party patrons. Straddling Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, the Ferghana Valley is also a site of potential inter-governmental and ethnic discord. USAID programs are aimed at facilitating community dialogue, promoting small business associations, and developing cross-border activities to bring divided communities together. Civil society activities partner NGOs with traditional "makhallas" (neighborhood committees) on community projects and small business development, including job training and placement. Other efforts are bringing together NGOs from the three different countries of the Ferghana Valley to share their experiences and consider joint projects promoting cross-border cooperation.

DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Chairman, regrettably, the human rights records of Central Asian governments have been poor, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Our work with NGOs on human rights enables us to strengthen indigenous groups fighting for increased government accountability. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, local groups are unable to challenge the state, and international human rights groups have been stymied in their efforts to gather information. In these countries, USAID shares information on international human rights norms in NGO civic education classes. In Uzbekistan, USAID also is educating women of all ages and classes in their legal rights.

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where human rights are not as severely violated, USAID has supported local human rights groups in their efforts to make their respective governments accountable to their citizens. In Tajikistan, the problem of human rights is directly related to the civil war, from which the country is still gradually emerging. Most abuses continue to be connected to tensions among the groups involved in the conflict. In this country, USAID promotes community dialogue through a variety of mechanisms and helps NGOs to work for civil peace, reconciliation and conflict resolution.

COMBATING CORRUPTION

Corruption is deeply-rooted in Central Asia's history. It has been an established way of doing business throughout the subregion and remains a major obstacle to the creation of open, transparent society and government. USAID's approach to combating corruption is primarily "bottoms up" and cuts across all sectors in which we provide assistance. Our primary thrust is to introduce the modern concepts of accountability and transparency, and global techniques of financial management and competitive procurement in government agencies, the business community, and citizens organizations. Specific programs in various countries include assistance to:

- reduce, streamline and publicize necessary government regulations and licensing procedures;
- establish clear and equitable customs and tax codes and administration;
- promote modern ethical standards throughout local governments and small businesses;
- train journalists and media managers in investigative practices and reporting;
- develop indigenous NGOs and information systems to monitor government and advocate change;
- build independent judiciaries through intensive training and exchanges for judges and lawyers;
- support civil service reform through training and exchanges for local government officials;
- insist on and facilitate public hearings, disclosure, and other information sharing with citizens;
- monitor and advise on specific government procurements, such as pharmaceuticals.

Within our modest means, USAID's efforts to address corruption in Central Asia are broad and multi-faceted, befitting the depth and pervasiveness of the problem. As with so many other aspects of our program, it is a long-term endeavor.

PUTTING USAID DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN PERSPECTIVE

USAID's core strategy in democracy-building includes political process, civil society, media and local governance activities. This is a significant and growing share of our portfolio. Yet, much of our democratization effort is embodied in other parts of our portfolio, such as fiscal and market reforms, enterprise development, health programs, energy sector restructuring, and environmental programs. We introduce democratic processes through such means as: support for

public hearings on rate and service issues; community involvement in group medical practices; professional and self-regulating associations, including chartered accountants' organizations and business advocacy groups; environmental awareness and management; and micro-saving and loan groups. Each of these approaches demonstrates and inculcates democratic processes. In promoting the development of small and medium enterprises, we help expand an important element of civil society.

We see USAID's contributions in the context of U.S. Government and other donors' initiatives. Clearly, our work is complemented by other U.S. Government programs, including Department of State Public Diplomacy, the Embassy Democracy Commissions, and Peace Corps. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe are important partners in promoting reforms in election processes, increasing respect for human rights, and combating corruption. The OSCE is establishing a presence in the subregion. They manage field operations for election monitoring, including the pre-election campaign period and post-election follow-up. We collaborate closely with the OSCE and take their observations and reports into account as we make program decisions. The OSCE and the Council of Europe also play an important role in promoting adherence to generally agreed-upon principles of human rights and the rule of law.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE: USAID ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN DEMOCRACY

While there is clearly much more to do, we are proud of what USAID programs have been able to accomplish. Civil society is growing in magnitude and sophistication in all five countries. Citizens' organizations, non-existent in 1991, now number over 3,000. Over 100 independent TV stations have increased the professional quality and quantity of news reporting. Local governments, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, are learning how to be more responsive and accountable to their citizens. All types of groups are organizing, solving problems locally, learning about their rights and developing the skills to take appropriate action. These are the building blocks for change. Let me give you two examples.

-- In preparation for a World Bank loan to improve water distribution, the city of Atyrau, Kazakhstan, is planning to raise water and sewer rates to full cost recovery. USAID technical advisors under the local government project to Kazakhstan used this opportunity to persuade city officials to hold public hearings to inform citizens about the World Bank loan and to seek their support for increased rates. USAID contractor personnel trained city staff in the nature and conduct of public hearings, and prepared the chairperson for the critical task of conducting the hearing openly and democratically.

The hearing -- which just took place last month -- was a real success in demonstrating government transparency and citizen participation. Approximately 150 citizens showed up for the meeting. Many of the speakers emotionally commented on the process, noting that this was the first time that the city had openly discussed decisions on major events and sought the public's support and opinions. The floor speakers ran the gamut from pensioners, to members of the elected city council, to members of NGOs, to representatives from the many housing condominiums. The audience was pleased and stimulated by the process and the city officials

were delighted with how the meeting unfolded. Immediately afterward, officials requested further USAID advice and assistance on a series of hearings they want to hold on other pending issues.

-- And, another example from Uzbekistan...

Last year, a USAID-funded NGO in Chirchik, Uzbekistan, expanded its program of civic and human rights education to 44 schools. With the support of this local NGO, a group of students used the knowledge gained through these new courses to advocate their rights with local government. Using official legal channels learned about in classes, the student group lodged a formal protest against the common practice of forced student labor during annual cotton harvests, a carry-over policy from the Soviet period. The district court ruled in the students' favor, and the mayor was forced to cancel his order to send children to collective farms. While the practice of forced labor during Uzbekistan's cotton harvest has received attention from international human rights organizations, this action by a small student group -- assisted by a local NGO -- was one of the first successful attempts to challenge the practice.

We have scores of individual stories like these. A few are summarized below, by country:

In Kyrgyzstan:

The government of Kyrgyzstan is increasingly accepting civil society participation in political and economic decision-making. The number of NGO-government contacts has increased more than six-fold, from 57 in 1998 to 359 in 1999.

NGO's advocacy skills continue to advance; the USAID-supported Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society served as an active member of the NGO Law Working Group and a number of recommendations from their report on the late 1998 constitutional referendum were incorporated into the Kyrgyz election law.

Parliament passed a crucial amendment to the mass media law that closed a loophole which allowed government regulators to shut down TV and radio broadcasters at will. USAID-funded support helped write the amendment. Now, any suspension of operations longer than 10 days requires a court decision.

Of the 30 women local "kenesh" (council) candidates who participated in a USAID-supported campaign planning seminar, 14 were elected.

In Kazakhstan:

NGO representatives participate in various government-led working groups on issues such as the draft NGO law and media frequency licenses. The impact of these efforts is evident in recent progressive changes to the Tax Code of Kazakhstan, which relieves NGOs of some heavy tax burdens.

NGOs in Kazakhstan are developing a strong network, supported through 30 newsletters and seven associations, and are increasingly involved in advocacy. Over the past year, the increasing number of fervent protests (e.g., several hunger strikes held by workers and women concerning salary payment arrears) throughout the country indicate that people are becoming more vocal about their social and economic status and want to be more involved in the decision-making process.

NGOs are using more innovative ways to reach out to their constituencies and stakeholders. With a USAID grant, the Feminist League of Almaty created a website (www.women.kz) that contains information on women's issues and a list of women's NGO webpages in Kazakhstan.

A USAID-supported journalists' rights advocacy organization, Edil Soz (True Word), is earning its place among the few media activists in the country by denouncing restrictions on press freedoms and providing guidance to media outlets. Edil Soz has also secured a place on a governmental commission controlling pornography and violence in an effort to work against unwarranted censorship of broadcasting.

USAID-supported efforts to provide commentary and suggested revisions to the new Law on Mass Media (adopted last year) opened a dialogue, albeit constrained, between journalists and the GOK. Media advocacy efforts have increased with the establishment of an active USAID-supported journalists' association and the provision of expanded legal services to non-state media outlets.

Elections continue to be problematic in Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, civil society organizations are taking a more active role as domestic monitors; approximately 1500 USAID-trained NGO representatives monitored the November 1999 parliamentary elections.

In Uzbekistan:

The Farmers' Center, an NGO from Karakalpakstan, has used its relations with local communities and local government to gather a constituency to lobby for the proper enforcement of local tax laws.

Legal services were recently provided to a TV station in Urgench that sued the government over a frequency license issue. With a courtroom full of supporting viewers, the Urgench station lost the case, but intends to appeal the decision.

A civic education summer camp, stimulating interest in democracy and volunteerism among the youth, was completed with the participation of over one hundred school-age children.

Just a few months into implementation, a women's legal rights initiative has trained over 50 trainers to carry out legal literacy workshops and a core group of representatives from leading women organizations around the country has formed an expert group.

A local NGO worked with neighborhood committees in the city of Bukhoro to establish an artisan training program for unemployed women in the poorest parts of the city.

In Tajikistan:

Through a USAID grant to the UNDP, former combatants are accessing employment opportunities and participating in multi-ethnic peace and reconciliation activities at the community level.

Private television and radio stations are being strengthened through modest equipment donations and management training. Several have introduced programs which promote the peace process, as a result of USAID-supported incentive programming.

Market-oriented commercial legislation is being promulgated and implemented with the support of USAID technical assistance and training of judges, procurators, and attorneys.

In Turkmenistan:

As a result of USAID assistance in community organizing in the northern part of the country, 18 different water user associations have been developed. These groups are taking the initiative and are in dialogue with local governments on the delivery of clean drinking water.

Over 1,450 members from 200 NGOs and initiative groups participated in USAID-sponsored training. The skills acquired have led to the awarding of 22 grants in FY 1999, totaling \$122,000.

As part of a strategy to build an NGO constituency with local and regional authorities, over 18 roundtables were held this past year at regional and district government offices.

TRACKING AND MEASURING PERFORMANCE

USAID has been documenting progress in democratic reform and institutional development through a number of instruments. For instance, our annual NGO Sustainability Index measures progress in the civil society sector throughout the region, including the Central Asian Republics. The index analyzes seven different dimensions of NGO sustainability in each country: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, public image, service provision and sectoral infrastructure. Understanding how countries are progressing along these dimensions enables us to tailor our assistance activities to local circumstances.

The attached chart compares progress in NGO sustainability across countries in Eurasia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan demonstrate the most progress among the Central Asian Republics, and in fact, are on par with or close behind other Eurasian countries.

Some key points:

-- In both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, elements of the index indicate that with respect to organizational capacity and public image, local NGOs have made good progress relative to the rest of Eurasia. In Kyrgyzstan, new legislation was approved in 1999 that greatly improves the legal environment for NGOs by establishing a legal basis for the creation of non-profit organizations and determining their clear distinction from commercial organizations.

-- In Uzbekistan, a new law on Non-Commercial, Non-Governmental Organizations was passed in 1999 that has improved the legal framework under which NGOs operate, and is paving the way for further reforms, including potential changes to the tax code to allow for tax exemptions for non-governmental organizations.

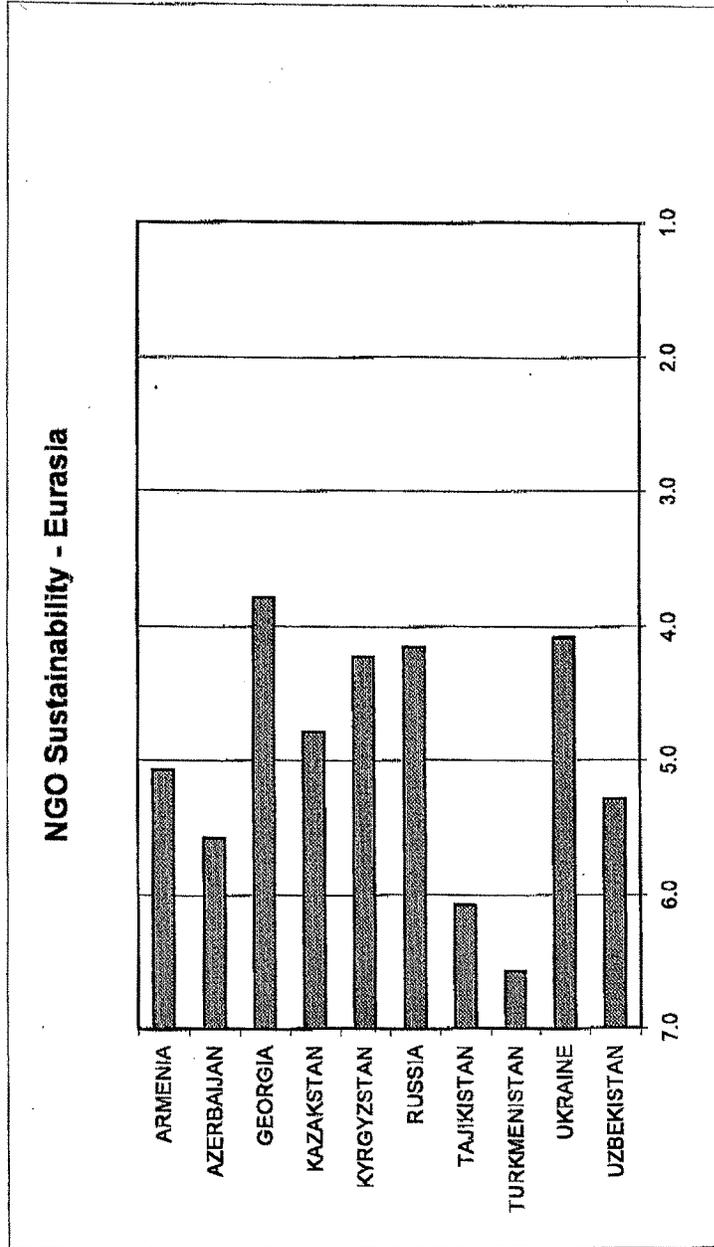
-- In Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, though NGO organizational capacity is limited and NGOs are highly dependent upon foreign donor support, the first real signs of civil society are beginning to emerge. A number of NGOs are improving their ability to provide services and are beginning to build both clientele and constituencies. In 1999, in Turkmenistan, a coalition of seven NGOs distributed over \$1,300,000 in humanitarian assistance to vulnerable groups.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, even though these examples show that USAID is making inroads into the development of civil society in Central Asia, we do not kid ourselves. This is a tough place to work, as so vividly demonstrated by all the severely flawed elections that have taken place. The poor human rights records of these five Republics underscore the autocratic nature of these governments; corruption levels suggest how little respect there is for the rule of law. Change in Central Asia is a long-term process as these countries grapple with the realities of being new nations while also addressing the basic issues related to poverty and declining health and education standards. At this point in time, we must measure progress in small incremental steps.

Still, this region is important to the United States and it is important to stay engaged. Our experience tells us it is worth the effort. The grassroots approach embodied in the USAID assistance strategy seems to be making a difference in the lives of individuals and communities. Our experience elsewhere teaches us that these elements are the building blocks for broader democratic reform in the future and that democratic change, economic restructuring, and social transition go hand-in-hand.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome your comments and questions.



Source: The 1999 NGO Sustainability Index, developed by the U.S. Agency for International Development, Bureau for Europe and Eurasia, Office of Democracy and Governance.

TESTIMONY

before the

**HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

on

DEMOCRACY IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS

by

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The Central Asian region has been a disappointing one from the point of view of democracy-building. In fact, the situation appears to grow worse with every passing year. Initially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seemed to be making steady progress toward the development of democratic or quasi-democratic polities, but in the past two years the regimes in each country have become more autocratic. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have had strongman rulers since the outset. Hopes for achieving a political opening in the former case were largely dashed after the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent. The one "bright light" is Tajikistan, where part of the opposition has been brought into government and the role of non-governmental groups has expanded in recent years. However, the government in Dushanbe is not yet in control of this war-torn country, and leaders in neighboring states see the "victories" of democracy in Tajikistan as further destabilizing the situation in their own countries.

The main reason why democracies have not developed in Central Asia is that the region's leaders don't want them to. However, the region's rulers would like us to believe that the failure of democracy-building in the region is a good thing, not a bad one. They portray their populations as unready for democracy, politically-immature and capable of being swayed by extreme ideologies. In addition, they say that their people respect strong rulers and like them and that as traditional Asians they are ill-disposed to democracy.

Most importantly, they argue that their neighborhood is too dangerous to allow them the risk of empowering the people. The latter explanation has become more popular over time, given the obviously deteriorating security situation in the countries in and around the region. The region's leaders all argue that security concerns are paramount,

and that the first challenge before the state is to maintain stability and social order.

Decisions about economic reform and political institution building are regularly subjected to the litmus test of whether policy initiatives are likely to help the government keep the peace.

Invariably, though, those in power view their continuation in office as inseparable from the cause of stability. Partly this is because they view themselves as most fit to rule, but in many cases it is also because they do not want to lose the perquisites of power. The latter has allowed each of these men to enrich themselves, their families and their cronies. The abuse with which this has occurred has varied from country to country, but the pattern is a region-wide one. This certainly put the governments at potential risk from their populations, especially if living conditions deteriorate. Alternative elites that are denied any possibility of economic and political power sharing can take advantage of popular dissatisfaction. Thus the behavior of the leaders can have a potent effect on the nature of the region's security risks.

However, for now the population of the region generally tolerates the actions of their leaders, the civil war years in Tajikistan (1991-1993) being a conspicuous exception. This does not mean that the population was unprepared for democracy, or that they will forever accept the current situation. At the time of independence it was by no means foreordained that this region would stay undemocratic.

The level of preparedness for democratic institution building and level of public engagement on civil society issues varied dramatically from country to country. Unfortunately many of the support structures necessary for democracy-building are disappearing in these countries with each passing year, this includes a committed elite

and the institutions necessary to sustain pluralistic or democratic societies. The consequences of this decision are still unclear, but they will receive their test when each of the current leaders inevitably departs from the political scene. The responses of each country to this challenge are likely to be quite distinct.

The State of Democracy-Building in Central Asia

With time, these five countries are each growing more unique. This is largely because of the different choices that are being made with regard to political, economic and social reform. Decisions to restrict democratization have reduced the number of political stakeholders in each of these societies. There is also an implicit relationship between political and economic reform. Economic reform also creates new political stakeholders, and the pattern of economic restructuring has varied considerably. So too have decisions about the empowerment of traditional institutions and local governments. Thus the potential consequences of the current failures in democratic institution-building vary from country to country. In general what goes on inside the country is more important than events beyond its borders. However, there are also important interdependencies throughout the region, and failures in one state can create new risks in neighboring countries.

Uzbekistan

These patterns of interdependency make Uzbekistan a critical nation to watch. Developments in Uzbekistan will influence those in the surrounding states. Ironically, developments in a neighboring state have played a disproportionate role in influencing political institution-building in Uzbekistan. The civil war in Tajikistan dealt a critical

blow to democracy-building efforts in Uzbekistan. There were many signs of political ferment in Uzbekistan in the late Gorbachev years, and the regime felt pressure from both secular nationalists and religious activists. Uzbekistan (and especially the Ferghana Valley) was the center of Islamic revivalism for the entire region. There were two large political groupings, *Erk* and *Birlik*, each of which was a nascent political party. In addition there was a great deal of dissent within the top ranks of the communist party elite, with most of the groupings mirroring regional divisions.

In this regard the political map of Uzbekistan was quite similar to that of Tajikistan, although the economic, political and social structure of the Uzbeks was more complex than that of the Tajiks. Most importantly, though, the quality of leadership exerted by Islam Karimov, who was already president of Uzbekistan at the time of independence, was far superior to that of his colleague in Tajikistan (Khakhar Makhkamov) who resigned from office in September 1991, after mass political protests crippled political life in the nation's capital. Political unrest in Uzbekistan has never reached that same fevered pitch. At the same time, the government has pursued a highly focused campaign against secular and religious political activists, dating back to 1992-1993.

In many ways Uzbekistan has the most thought-out model of state-building in the region, although it is far from clear that it will be able to meet the challenges that this state faces. Karimov has been looking to institutionalize a system where there is a strong man on top, who chooses regional rulers but then allows a certain range of autonomous action, and re-empowered traditional institutions. This model is designed to create a wide range of stakeholders in the regime, particularly at the local level. Key to the model

is Karimov's support for the maintenance of a strong social welfare net, which is designed to stimulate mass political allegiance. Local institutions (the mahalles) have much of the responsibility for supervising payments to and disbursements from the welfare system, which makes these local officials important stakeholders. At the same time, though, it allows the Karimov regime to cast blame on regional and local officials when the welfare delivery system fails.

The system though, is dependent on the state maintaining a certain threshold of economic productivity. While official Uzbek figures on GDP would suggest that this country has not suffered the same precipitous economic decline that many neighboring states have experienced, conditions on the ground tell a different story. The Uzbek government has managed to maintain a minimum standard of living across society by sharply restricting the convertibility of the national currency, the Uzbek som, and by maintaining price supports on strategic commodities well beyond the time that they were in effect in most neighboring countries.

These decisions about economic reform are creating their own form of political risk. At the time of independence Uzbekistan was one of the most entrepreneurial of the post-Soviet states, with a thriving "black" or "second" economy. However, economic conditions in the country in recent years have led to the thwarting of many thousands of these potential entrepreneurs, ranging from small business owners to powerful economic and political figures. In other words, the number of potential economic stakeholders in the country has been sharply reduced, and with them the number of potential political stakeholders.

By holding up on economic reform the government has increased elite dissatisfaction in favor of meeting a perceived mass demand. They have also made it more difficult for alternative political elites to achieve economic power, something that has increased their frustration. It is also not clear that they have set up the preconditions necessary to meet mass demand in the future, and if they have not they have simply transferred the period of maximum political risk from the years just after independence to a period further down the road.

At some point Uzbekistan is going to have to make its currency convertible and engage in systematic economic reform. They promised to do the former in 2000, although it does not appear likely that they will. However, Uzbekistan cannot continue its economic isolation indefinitely, as foreign reserves are dropping and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to attract foreign investment into the country. The reform process is sure to create renewed hardship for the Uzbek people, and to fuel the fans of opposition against the regime.

The forms that this opposition will take are likely to be quite different from the methods adopted by opposition groups in the previous decade. Secular nationalists have suffered from the restrictions that have been placed on the development of independent civil and political institutions. Independent media exists in name, but not in fact, as the combination of formal and self-censorship limits the exercise of the existing rights of self-expression. Multi-candidate and even multi-party elections were held for parliament in 1999, but only pro-regime forces were permitted to participate, and the range of political debate is sharply restricted.

Islamic opposition groups have been forced underground or to flee the country. Uzbekistan has a long and rich tradition of religious debate between Islamic radicals, modernists and traditionalists which the regime is now stifling. The nature of religious opposition is such that anti-regime groups have been able to better position themselves than have their secular counterparts. The number of Muslim followers of fundamentalist ideologies has increased in the past several years, as the first wave of revivalists has now trained its successors, allowing the number of devout believers to increase in a geographic progression. It should not be presumed that all Islamic activists are potential terrorists, they obviously are not, but a serious Islamic threat now exists in Uzbekistan that did not previously. Partly, it is the neighborhood; Islamic activists have been able to receive formal training in maintaining underground organizations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. They have also found new ways of self-financing, through foreign assistance and by accepting overtures from the drug trade.

This does not mean that Uzbekistan will have a religious revolution, or that it should suppress religious opposition. In fact, quite the opposite is true. One of the major casualties of Uzbekistan's crackdown on non-sanctioned political groupings is that there is still no natural accommodation between the country's secular and religious traditions. In theory the two could exist in relatively comfortable and close proximity, but in practice efforts by the government to regulate religious life are making relations between the two more strained.

As a result religious themes are far more likely to be used as a way to mobilize popular opposition to the regime than might otherwise be the case. It is not beyond the realm of the possible that secular and religious opponents could make common cause,

with the weakened position of the former increasing the likelihood that the latter would dominate.

This is why the question of economic reform is so critical in Uzbekistan. The longer it is postponed, the more difficult it will be for an alternative secular political elite to develop an independent economic base. Delaying economic reform doesn't eliminate the risk of social unrest, it merely postpones it, and the weak record of civil society institution-building in Uzbekistan has made it unlikely that this protest will be channeled in peaceful and easily managed ways should it develop. Much will depend upon local and traditional political stakeholders and how they respond to any future political crisis. This crisis is not necessarily looming, but it is sure to materialize as President Karimov weakens physically, given the failure of the Uzbek government to institutionalize any mechanisms for national elite recruitment and succession. What makes the situation in Uzbekistan most unstable is the inability to predict when this will occur, as the social landscape of the country is not nearly as static as the state of political institution-building.

Kyrgyzstan

The situation in Uzbekistan has had an obvious influence on developments in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Southern Kyrgyzstan is very permeable, along its borders with both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The risks associated with this permeability were clearly demonstrated at the time of the Batken hostage crisis in summer and fall 1999, when a group of Uzbek fighters held Kyrgyz and Japanese hostages for several months in a remote mountain region.

These actions occurred at a time when the Kyrgyz government was in the process of backing away from its commitment to democratic principles, and provided a further

justification for them. The real motivations behind the Kyrgyz government actions are really more complex. Like most of its neighbors, at the time of independence Kyrgyzstan had a nascent democratic movement, which was further empowered by supporters of a putsch within the communist party, as it served their purposes in undermining the role of Kyrgyz communist party leader Absamat Masaliev. Once he came to power (by vote of the Supreme Soviet in October 1990), Akaev became a champion of these groups, and even more vocal one after the failed August putsch in 1991.

Akaev, who was probably the most astute observer of the west in the region, understood that advancing the cause of democracy in the country would work to the national as well as to his own personal interest. This strategy worked for the first several years. Kyrgyzstan was considered a model in the region, a state committed to democratization and economic reform. This led to a much higher than average per capita foreign assistance to the country, and attracted some foreign investment which otherwise might not have gone into the country.

In the Kyrgyz context the policies of political and economic reform greatly increased the number of stakeholders in the regime. The policies of economic restructuring in Kyrgyzstan have had positive effect, in helping to stimulate some new business activity. Most promising are reforms in agriculture, as they create the possibility that the poorest part of the population will become economically self-sufficient.

However, the standard of living of most Kyrgyz is still continuing to deteriorate, which is contributing to President Akaev's growing unpopularity in the country. This unpopularity makes him vulnerable to defeat (although not definitionally unelectable). He

has also become more fearful of defeat. One reason for this is the growing corruption in official circles. At the same time that many Kyrgyz have grown poorer, members of the official family have grown richer, and have begun to dominate certain key sectors of the economy and to be monopolists in trade as well. They have managed to use the courts and the tax courts in particular to gain control of assets that they desire.

At the same time it has become more difficult to complain about these abuses. Formal and informal restrictions on the press have increased, and there have been new restrictions placed on public protest. Most serious though are the abuses of the electoral system, and in particular the treatment of opposition politicians. For the past few years the tax courts have been used for political purposes, but the incidents of this abuse increased dramatically during the period of the recent parliamentary elections. Even before the campaign began, popular opposition figures felt that they were vulnerable to arrest. Their fears proved to be quite warranted. The most disturbing arrest is that of Feliks Kulov, former number two man in the Kyrgyz government, and most recently Mayor of Bishkek, as he was a major presidential contender. Kulov and his supporters charged vote fraud when he failed to gain a seat during the recent parliamentary elections, and now a record of successful administrative or criminal prosecution would disqualify Kulov from seeking further office.

Kyrgyzstan's turn away from democracy poses real challenges for the foreign community, as Kyrgyzstan's political system really was this small, isolated and poor nation's most redeeming feature. If there is not a rapid reversal in political developments, it will be hard for the western community to maintain its earlier strong support for the Akaev regime. Political crackdown in Kyrgyzstan need not be a recipe for civil war or

even civil unrest. It is a way to guarantee, though, that a poor country will simply grow poorer, and more dependent upon powerful neighbors. Kyrgyzstan could even become a failed state, especially since the growing drug trade through Central Asia is leading to the criminalization of the economy especially in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Kazakhstan

The current pattern of behavior in Kyrgyzstan is similar to that of Kazakhstan. In 1999 President Nursultan Nazarbayev held very questionable parliamentary and presidential elections. Here too opposition was sharply limited common in their participation and the main political opponent of the president, in this case former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin was arrested in order to bar him from seeking office. Unlike Kulov's arrest, the detention of Kazhegeldin was a brief one, although his entourage continues to be hassled by the authorities.

However, in many ways the crackdown in Kazakhstan is less troubling than that in Kyrgyzstan. The problem is that the nature of stakeholding in Kyrgyzstan was directly linked to the policies of reform. By contrast, there were multiple sources of stakeholding in Kazakhstan, simply because of the complexity of the former society. Kazakhstan is implicitly pluralistic, given the country's enormous size (roughly two thirds that of the continental US), its economic complexity and ethnic diversity.

This informal pluralism is not a substitute for formal pluralism, but it does help keep alive the potential for democratic development in the absence of a supportive environment. That supportive environment is no longer present in Kazakhstan. Initially, until about 1995, the government of Kazakhstan pursued a policy of encouraging the

development of pluralistic institutions, or at least of not actively seeking to restrict their development.

From that time on the government has been on the defensive in the political arena, although considerably increasing the scope of independent economic activity. Executive power has been strengthened, legislative power diminished, and the judiciary serves the interests of the incumbent regime. Kazakh media is also growing less free with time. Economic reform has been episodic, but has been largely linear, and it is currently much easier for foreigners to do business in Kazakhstan than anywhere else in the region. This does not mean that investment is secure, or that the playing field is level one. Here too the presidential family is becoming increasingly more powerful, as are those who are close to the "court." Currency is freely tradable, property is relatively sacrosanct, and the diversity of the economy is such that independent economic stakeholders are beginning to develop throughout the country. Regional economies are also beginning to develop. As yet neither the regions, nor the independent political actors have much political influence. They are also still too cautious to actively seek it, but they are likely to be a force that will need to be reckoned with at the time that power begins to ebb away from President Nazarbayev.

Much of Kazakhstan's future stability depends upon the success of economic reform, and whether the government is able to help the increasingly more impoverished lower third to half of the population maintain a minimal standard of living. The growing criminalization of the economy is a threat in Kazakhstan as well, although Kazakhstan is more removed from the risks of extremist or terrorist groups than is Kyrgyzstan. However, unrest in neighboring states would cast a shadow over prospects of foreign

investment in Kazakhstan as well, and make the potentially diverse economy of the country more dependent upon oil and gas development, pipelines and pipeline politics. This would be troubling, as economic development is Kazakhstan's best recipe for success and for the eventual development of a civil and pluralistic society.

Turkmenistan

In many ways Turkmenistan is the most opaque of the Central Asian societies. It has an anachronistic political system. Saparmurad Niyazov, has taken the name Turkmenbashi (head Turkmen) in the style of Attaturk, but constructed a cult of personality that makes him more like a space-age version of a traditional medieval Khan. A seventy-five foot gold likeness of himself sits atop the Arch of Neutrality, which rotates with the sun to cast Niyazov's shadow over most of downtown Ashgabat, the nation's capital. Most prominent institutions are named after Niyazov, his photo is displayed at just about every important intersection and on all but the most insignificant of the Turkmen currency. Media is tightly controlled, and there is no intellectual life to speak of in the country.

In the first years of independence, when it looked like oil and gas wealth was just around the corner and that there would be plenty of revenue to raise the general standard of living of this small underpopulated nation, the peculiarities of the Turkmen political system seemed less troubling to potential political and economic stakeholders. This country has never had a large political opposition, and Niyazov's rivals from within the old communist party elite have been forced to leave the country. The President has managed to use foreign interest in Turkmenistan's oil and gas resources to accrue personal wealth for his family and close cronies. However, the other branches of the

economy (especially the cotton sector) have allowed leading regional families (often powerful because of their tribal background) to continue to maintain some economic influence. Niyazov has tried to keep them at arm's length by periodically rotating the cadre close to him (which include representatives of these families), but these powerful regional families are certain to try and assert their influences in any subsequent succession struggle. However, they will have no democratic institutions to make use of in these efforts.

Tajikistan

In many ways Tajikistan has made the most strides toward creating a civil society, in large part because the only way out of the crisis engendered by the civil war was to build a coalition government. The civil war itself was partly a product of the desire of certain elite groups (including those around the incumbent President Imamali Rakhmonov) to avoid power-sharing arrangements, especially with the Islamists. Tajikistan is the only country in the region to allow the Islamists a formal role of the governing of society, and Islamists are included in parliament and in the cabinet. The current coalition though under-represents the long-dominant Uzbek (or Uzbek oriented) elite from northern Tajikistan (Khujand province). The government in Dushanbe also exerts only very loose control over the Pamiri population of the country (who live in the Badakhshan region). Tajikistan also has the most criminalized economy in the region, creating a state within a state. Drugs dominate in the border areas with Afghanistan, and the mayor of Dushanbe is said to meet his municipal needs by taxing the drug trade. The pervasive atmosphere of lawlessness makes other Central Asian leaders frightened of the

Tajik example, rather than eager to imitate the country's more open and inclusive political style.

Should the US Try to Change the Situation

This brief survey of the region is a depressing one from the point of view of democracy-building. While it would be unfair to say that US efforts in this regard have done no good, it is also clear that they have not yet had the desired effect. In the past two years the two states that showed the most promise of democratic reform, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have retreated from their earlier commitments. The two that were least interested in democratic reform, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, have begun to function increasingly as security states. Borders throughout the region are tightening, but these two states are sharply monitoring the internal movements of people as well. Tajikistan has had some success at democratic institution-building, but it is unclear whether or not the Tajik state will be able to recover from the civil war that it experienced.

This does not mean that all US efforts have been for naught. There is a tradition of independent media developing in most of the countries of the region, even if what they can broadcast is still restricted. A new generation of lawyers and other legal experts is receiving training, and with time they should be able to provide a more forceful lobby for the need for legal reform. The number of people with formal training in business and economics is also increasing, and they too seem certain to push for the need for legal reforms in the area of protection of property. The next generation of administrators throughout the region should be better trained than the current one, and they will be able to draw on the expertise and involvement of those active in the growing non-

governmental organization sector. This sector is increasing throughout the region, although its vitality is greatest in non-political sectors.

It is in US interest to continue our investment in the human capital of Central Asia. However, we shouldn't exaggerate the influence that these training programs are likely to have. Young people with knowledge of the west and a notion of how a pluralistic society operates are certain to be more effective interlocutors, but they need not make better and more dependable partners for the US. The institutions that are developing in Central Asia are not generally supportive of democratic values, and as young people get recruited into them, they are more likely to bend to the existing institutional patterns of behavior than to reform them.

This does not mean that the US should not engage in Central Asia. But as we do we should be mindful about how slowly and incompletely societies are transformed, even in the global information age. Five new states are developing in Central Asia, each with its own unique blend of old and new, traditional and modern, western and non-western, democratic and non-democratic features. Ethnic, religious and national loyalties are all showing their fluidity, and as they evolve they will lead to the shaping and reshaping of political as well as economic institutions. The first big transformation or upheaval is likely to come with the current group of officials leave power. Until then it is too soon to speak of the long-term prospects of democracy in the region.

**BREEDING ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM:
THE DECLINING PROSPECTS FOR DEMOCRACY
IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA**

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**Testimony prepared for a hearing of
The International Relations Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
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The governments of post-Soviet Central Asia are producing what they say they most want to avoid: growing instability and the rise of a radical Islamist opposition. Moreover, the two most important outside actors, Russia and the West, are unintentionally encouraging this process, in the first case so as to extend Moscow's influence and in the second in the name of maintaining stability. But as a result, the prospects for democracy and the stability that it can bring in all five of the countries of this important region are now worse than they have been at any time since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

This sobering conclusion, one that suggests these countries might follow the

authoritarian, anti-Western path pursued by Iran, Algeria and several other Islamic countries, reflects the nature of the post-communist regimes in these countries, the nature of Islam as it has evolved there first under the Soviet system and now under its successors, and finally the nature of the involvement of outside powers. Those three things and the way they are likely to interact are my subject here.

Some Dangerous Continuities

In his classic essay of a generation ago, "Will the Soviet Union Survive until 1984?" Andrei Amalrik predicted that the countries of post-Soviet Central Asia were far more likely to continue Soviet patterns of behavior long after communist power fell than any other countries that might emerge from the rubble of the collapse of the USSR. He argued that the congruence, even fusion of the traditional patriarchal forms of rule with Marxist-Leninist methods would have the effect of preserving the Soviet system -- albeit under other names. And that preservation of the past, he concluded, would mean that when change did come to the region, it was likely to be more radical, more anti-Western, and hence more dangerous than anywhere else.

Tragically, as so often happens to a prophet, Amalrik's words on this point have been ignored even after his fundamental prediction came true. Even more tragically, his prediction about Central Asia appears to be ever more likely to prove true as well.

Overwhelmingly, the Soviet leadership of these republics remains in place. Three of the five presidents were first secretaries of the republic communist parties before independence. And even in the two countries which have "new" leaders? Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan? both the lower levels of the state apparatus and the values of the Soviet leadership appear predominant. All five leaders have adopted strategies designed to keep themselves and their entourages in power regardless of the popular will. All of them have suppressed or simply sought to control the institutions of a genuine civil society. And all of them have liberally used the vocabulary of democracy even as they have sought to severely limit popular participation.

In many ways, these five countries are very different, but the approach to governance by their leaders has in fact converged. Initially, many analysts were sharply critical of the openly anti-democratic attitudes of the leaders of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, somewhat more hopeful about Kazakhstan, and openly optimistic about Kyrgyzstan. (Tajikistan has been in a civil war for almost all of the period, and few expected democracy to emerge from that conflict anytime soon.)

But in the last few years, Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev has become ever more authoritarian and narrowly based on his extended family. And Kyrgyzstani President Asker Akayev has disappointed those who hoped he would lead the way to democracy in the region. Their two countries still remain more open than Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which are ruled respectively by a leader who runs things along traditional authoritarian lines and by one who maintains the Soviet communist system in all but name. And increasingly, the leaders in all five suggest that democracy in the Western sense must be abandoned because of cultural

reasons or postponed indefinitely because of threats to stability.

Still worse, these leaders have done everything they could to prevent the emergence of a genuine civil society that could simultaneously provide support for their governments over time and produce a new generation of leaders. All five governments maintain tight control over the electronic media, most of them openly censor the print media as well, and the privatization of the media has often been into the hands of government loyalists or even the family members of the president. Journalists are harassed and in some cases even killed. Their sources are incarcerated or otherwise intimidated.

Genuine NGOs are severely restricted in their activities or even banned altogether, with the authorities recreating a phenomenon pioneered by the Soviet regime: government-organized non-governmental organizations or GONGOs. Such groups are trotted out by the authorities to demonstrate that these regimes are moving in a democratic direction, a tactic that works all too often not only in Central Asia but elsewhere as well because many Western governments and scholars now equate NGO development with democratic change. And these regimes have sought to draw on the traditional identities of the population, ethnic and religious, even as they have sought to denature these attachments, to redefine them to fit the post-Soviet leadership.

But largely because of Western insistence and because they hope to generate support for themselves, albeit on their own terms, the leaders of the countries of this region have used the vocabulary and even forms of democracy while draining both of any real content.

That combination in turn has produced a fragile authoritarianism of superficially powerful regimes but with little or no genuine popular support, with little or no ability to withstand extrasystemic challenges to their rule, and with little or no chance to transfer power from one generation of leaders to another in a peaceful and democratic way. And thus, while they may appear stable for the moment, these regimes lack the institutional and political frameworks necessary to remain stable during the rapidly approaching period when the current crop of leaders will pass from the scene.

Central Asian Islam as an Available Identity

Islam does not represent a threat to either the social order or political arrangements in Central Asia; but Islamist politics do. Indeed, in the countries of this region, Islamist politics may prove to be the most potent force over the next generation.

This apparent paradox reflects three things that are often neglected in the analysis of the Central Asian states: First, Soviet policies had the effect of removing the content of Islam while leaving the label as an important marker of identity, thus opening the way for its fundamental redefinition by political entrepreneurs either supportive or opposed to particular regimes. That also has meant that divisions within Islam that are viewed as so important elsewhere -- between the four schools of Sunni Islam, between Sunni and Shiia Islam, and between the dominant community and the more restricted Sufi orders -- are significantly less significant in

defining how Central Asians who adhere to one or the other will interact with one another.

Second, the post-Soviet regimes there have continued the Soviet practice in many ways even as they transform it in others. On the one hand, these regimes have sought to exploit the Islamic identity of the population as part of post-Soviet identities but to do so in a way that Islamic precepts play much less of a role in political life there than in many countries and also and more significantly in a way that restricts participation by Muslims qua Muslims in political life. Indeed, in its own way, the current regimes are more anti-Muslim than the Soviet regime was because it has more to fear.

And third, precisely because these regimes are able to contain most of the other elements that could provide the basis for the emergence of an independent civil society but refuses to deal with Islam in a supportive way but cannot eliminate either this primordial tie or the institutions that support it, these governments have put themselves at risk of going the way of the shah of Iran. Indeed, many opposition figures of a more liberal persuasion in these countries are convinced that Western support for the governments are playing the same role that Western support for the shah played in Iran -- and more importantly, it will lead to the same consequences.

Here I will focus on these three things, but one preliminary remark is in order. Most discussions about Islam in Central Asia today have been cast in terms of a Taliban-sponsored threat supposedly sweeping north from Afghanistan through Tajikistan even, in the words of some, "to the gates of Moscow." Such discussions in almost every case are intended to push a political agenda rather than to describe reality. The Taliban does not pose the kind of threat that many in Central Asia and elsewhere suggest. It is largely a self-limiting Afghan group, although it does have some ties to Tajik groups in northern Afghanistan. But such charges made in the name of political agendas extraneous to the analysis of facts on the ground have often come to be believed by leaders and thus become at least in part a self-fulfilling prophecy at least with respect to policy choices.

That has had the effect of detracting attention from the very real role that Islamic attachments do play and has often meant that the expert community has downplayed these precisely because it is convinced that Islam in its Taliban movement form is no genuine threat at all.

As in so many other spheres of life, Soviet policy toward religion in general and Islam in particular was designed to make them national in form but socialist and soviet in content. Islam was during the course of the Soviet period reduced to a shadow of its former self, with the officially permitted Islamic establishment putting forth a completely denatured version of the faith, with individuals who continued to identify as Muslims lacking any access to information about what that attachment actually meant, and with those few who did have such information -- elders who passed on the information privately to a small group -- frequently being presented as the only true bearers.

Indeed, much Western and even Soviet commentary on Islam focused on what many

called the "non-mosque" trend of Islam. Some out of hope and others out of fear saw this as the most important challenge to Soviet power, but in fact as neither Western nor Soviet commentators were happy to conclude, the Islam these groups practiced was also a shell, an identity rather than a program, a primordial tie rather than a political reality. And Islam did not play the role many had expected it to play during the last years of Soviet power.

Not surprisingly, this approach tended to break down most of the important divisions within Islam. When Muslims felt themselves under attack by the Soviet regime, they were less inclined to make these distinctions, in many cases because they no longer knew what they were. And thus suggestions by many that Sufis or Wahhabis or someone else were playing a special role had less to do with facts on the ground or with the meanings of these terms as usually understood than many who used them clearly believed.

Indeed, surveys that have been done show that many Muslims cannot define even the most basic elements of their faith but retain attachment to it as a marker rather than as a guide. The author of this note was once by Chechen President Djokhar Dudayev that he was a good Muslim and prayed three times a day. Of course, a good Muslim prays five times a day; something a man who had been in the Soviet military and the Communist Party since the age of 18 might not have known. But this does not mean that Dudayev was not in some sense a Muslim because that is how he styled himself even as he insisted on his other identities as well.

Yet another Soviet inheritance that tends to be forgotten is that the Soviet system insisted that certain identities were acceptable and certain others were not, thus creating a hierarchy which the regime tried to control through rewards and benefits. Declaring oneself an Uzbek was good while declaring oneself a Muslim was seldom career enhancing. Not surprisingly, people learned to declare certain things and not to declare others; and regimes learned that they could thus control the manifestation of identities even if they could not control the identities themselves.

Almost a quarter of a century ago, the heroine of an Uzbek novel said that she felt always like a Russian matryoshka doll that others were assembling or disassembling and consequently she seldom knew which identity would be on the outside exposed to the world. She expressed what was then a vain hope that she would someday be able to decide which layer could be exposed and hence be the basis of her identity.

Her observations in the novel, *The Diamond Bracelet*, call attention to two things that are often downplayed in a discussion of Islam in Uzbekistan. On the one hand, Uzbeks like everyone else are a bundle of different identifications; they are not one thing at all times. Consequently, those who thought that Islam would overwhelm Uzbekness were simply wrong. And on the other, the Uzbek authorities of today were given a powerful model of how to manipulate identities by rewarding certain kinds of declarations and punishing others, rather than by directly attacking one or the other and seeking to eliminate it. Whatever Soviet intentions may have been, that was what Soviet practice in Uzbekistan consisted of.

In ways that should have surprised no one but that were completely at odds with the predictions of most Western analysts, the post-Soviet regimes in Central Asia sought to enlist the support of Islamic identity while continuing the Soviet-era practice of excluding Islam as a political force and denaturing it through control of its content.

The regimes of this region have set up their own national official Islamic establishments. These claim to be speaking in the name of Islam. And they regularly invoke Islam to support the current regime. But at the same time, they clearly seek to restrict any Islamic claims to greater participation in political life and thus continue to denature Islam as a potential guiding force within the political system. To that end, Islam as a force is demonized by discussions of the role of foreign groups, like the Taliban or Wahhabism, as a way of discrediting Islamic attachments by the population.

And also toward that end, all five governments to varying degrees have restricted popular access to Islam even as it has proclaimed that it is doing anything but. Their police forces have penetrated the mosque, the security organs have coopted part of the ulema, and the governments have thus moved to deprive Muslims of the kind of independent status they would most probably seek were they in a better position to know their religious traditions.

In all this, these regimes have followed Russian efforts to reaffirm the Orthodox Church's caesaropapist traditions, hoping to make Islam a national religion in ways that Islam as such does not really allow. And thus their policies have had the effect of once again dividing the faithful into those with little information about their religion into supporters of the official line -- the overwhelming majority, it should be said -- and those with more information who thus counterpose Islam to the official political establishment.

This latter group, while still relatively small, may prove to be most important over the next generation. Precisely because these rulers like the shah has been relatively effective in stifling all other forms of civil society representation and because Muslims in this region generally lack a precise understanding of Islam in all its complexity, the governments in Central Asia are watching the emergence of a new underground Islam, a movement that can attract and organize all opposition to these regimes -- precisely because they can offer access to the primordial tie that does unite all Muslims. A recent example of such linkages comes from Azerbaijan where the liberals are now making common cause with several Islamist parties.

To the extent that happens, these Muslim groups could quickly emerge as the dominant feature once the current leaders pass from the stage, and as a result, these countries could be transformed into a radical Islamic state even as such states are passing from the scene elsewhere. And those Islamist political entrepreneurs could hijack the opposition movement even as they did in Iran 20 years ago.

None of this is inevitable. But it is one of the challenges that face the countries of Central Asia and those outside who care about their fate. And it also dictates both a strategy and a diplomacy for those concerned about the emergence of such a regime; one that could undercut much that has been achieved across this region.

Geopolitical Competition and Regional Instability

Meeting these challenges would be difficult for these countries on their own. Unfortunately, these challenges have been compounded by the policies adopted by the two outside actors who play the largest role in the region. On the one hand, the Russian government is ever more interested in winning back the positions it lost in the region in 1991 by playing up to the current leaders and by positing threats to them so that the region will turn again to Moscow for aid. And on the other, Western governments generally adopted a very short-term approach, supporting or at least avoiding too open criticism of the authoritarian regimes there in the name of stability and in order to allow for outside economic development.

Especially since the rise of Russian President elect Vladimir Putin, Moscow has argued that threats to instability in Central Asia coming from Islamist political groups in Afghanistan and elsewhere is so great that democratic procedures may have to be put off indefinitely and that all these states must cooperate with the Russian authorities in order to prevent them from being swept away. Such attitudes were very much on view last week when the security council secretaries of the region convened in Dushanbe. And such a message appears to be gaining Moscow new converts in the region.

Meanwhile, the West has been extremely reticent in criticizing the rising authoritarianism of these regimes. Instead, it has focused on short-term goals and evaluated these governments largely in terms of the performance of elections when these regimes actually have them. One American official in the region noted privately not long ago that the only reason people in Washington thought that Kyrgyzstan was more democratic than Kazakhstan was that the Kyrgyz government had not had an election quite so recently.

Happily, the US and some European countries are beginning to be more critical of these regimes, an apparent recognition that the aging leaders of these five countries may be able to control the situation as long as they are alive and in office but that they are creating a situation where their successors will be very different and much less interested in either promoting democracy or working with the West.

All of this recalls the Western approach to the shah of Iran, where uncritical support for an openly authoritarian regime led to its replacement by a theocratic and anti-Western tyranny. The governments in Central Asia are breeding Islamic fundamentalism even as they talk about democracy, however modified, and the historical record suggests that a failure to speak up on this now will have the most serious consequences for the people of this region and for us as well.

**Joint Hearing of
 the House International Relations
 Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific
 and
 Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights
 Democracy in the Central Asian Republics
 Wednesday, April 12 2000**

**Cassandra Cavanaugh
 Researcher
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Introduction

Human Rights Watch is very grateful to Chairman Bereuter and the other members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify at this hearing. Coming as it does on the eve of the Secretary of State's trip to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, this hearing is an important opportunity to review both the political development of the Central Asian states, and United States policies in the region.

Since 1990, Human Rights Watch, a non-governmental, non-profit organization, has closely monitored human rights conditions in the five former Soviet Central Asian republics through frequent research missions. We have had researchers stationed in Dushanbe, Tajikistan since 1994, and in Tashkent, Uzbekistan since 1996.

Nearly a decade ago, the dissolution of the Soviet Union raised hopes that vast new areas of the globe would come under democratic forms of governance. The five states of former Soviet Central Asia have done much to dash these hopes. Once known as "countries in transition," at the turn of the new century the Central Asian states have largely seen their political transitions from communism completed--transitions not to democracy but to authoritarianism.

The United States has pursued an integrated policy towards the region, correctly recognizing that democratization, economic development and stability are inseparable. Now that progress towards democratization in the region has decisively stalled, however, the U.S. has continued to advance other aspects of bilateral relations--such as economic support and security assistance--without linking them to political reform. A short summary of the political developments of the past year will demonstrate, I hope, how integrally democratization and stability in the region are linked, and that they should be pursued in tandem and with equal vigor.

Human Rights in Central Asia: An Overview

From 1991-1999, the states of Central Asia made some progress in creating the outward trappings of democracy. All of the countries have elected legislatures and enacted constitutions which enshrine popular sovereignty, the rule of law and the separation of powers. All states but Kazakhstan have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Despite these innovations, substantive democratization was highly uneven. Tajikistan exploded into civil war in 1992, as regional factions fought to displace the northerners who dominated during Soviet times. The resulting 1997 settlement entrenched a different regional grouping, but did little to redress the grievances of still-excluded factions. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan never allowed either critical media or full-fledged political opposition to form. Turkmenistan succeeded in imprisoning nearly all dissenting

voices or forcing them into exile. In Uzbekistan, the government forbade all independent political activity, both religious and secular, and jailed, exiled and "disappeared" many of its critics. The absence of legitimate outlets for deep social discontent has channeled this sentiment into loose Islamic groupings, which the state has also banned. In contrast, both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan allowed for a modicum of press freedom, and legislatures which actually accommodated measured opposition to their presidents' policies, though the powers of those legislatures were constantly eroded by presidential fiat.

Since the mid-1990s, Human Rights Watch has noted a steady decline in respect for basic human rights, including civil and political rights, in all five Central Asian countries. Particularly over the past year, that decline has accelerated precipitously, as each government has endeavored to maintain its hold on power by compromising the fairness of scheduled presidential and legislative elections. Though the array and intensity of rights violations has varied from country to country, there has been a rapid deterioration in respect for internationally guaranteed human rights throughout the region.

1999-2000: A Turning Point

Throughout the post-independence period, the international community waited patiently for democracy to take hold in the region, and supplied millions of dollars in technical assistance and aid aimed at building democratic institutions. The parliamentary elections scheduled in each of the countries in 1999-2000, and presidential polls scheduled in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan during the same two-year interval were viewed as a test of those states' commitment to democratic reform. All five states failed this test miserably and predictably.

Presidential and parliamentary elections in 1999 took place amidst coordinated government efforts to limit freedom of speech, assembly, and association, which prevented citizens from making free and informed decisions on voting day. Each government kept would-be candidates off the ballot by questionable means. Flagrantly violating their own election laws, local government authorities used all means at their disposal to promote government-favored candidates and to block any opponents from campaigning effectively. Finally, local and international monitors have documented how agents of the executive branches took pains to falsify vote counts in elections in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the OSCE considered parliamentary votes were so meaningless as to not merit full-scale observer missions.

The elections of 1999 and early 2000 occasioned massive and systematic violations of citizens' rights. Moreover, the consolidation of authoritarian rule in each of these states has complicated efforts to find solutions to deep social crises, deteriorating economies, and to ward off external threats.

In Turkmenistan, the virtual one-man government of President Niazov intensified pressure against the few frail expressions of civil society, particularly Protestant and other non-traditional religious groups. Niazov continues to jail the few remaining government critics, and has presided over the removal of all term limits in order to become president for life.

In Tajikistan, elections were accompanied by state-condoned violence, intimidation of opposition candidates, and repression of the independent media. The effective exclusion of most opposition factions from the legislative and executive branches of government which resulted continues to threaten the fragile peace accord.

In Uzbekistan, the government blamed bombings in the capital Tashkent in February last year on a conspiracy of outlawed secular and religious opposition leaders. Over the course of 1999, thousands of their supporters were arrested, tortured, and jailed. Hundreds fled the country, and some joined armed

bands calling themselves the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in neighboring Tajikistan. In August, those bands staged an incursion into neighboring Kyrgyzstan, took hostages, and demanded passage back to Uzbekistan and the release of unjustly imprisoned Muslims. They retreated back to Tajikistan, and are said to be planning further military actions. Only state-sponsored parties were allowed to take part in November's parliamentary elections. In the presidential vote even the one alternative candidate (the head of the former Communist party) admitted voting for President Karimov. Arrests of all those suspected of the ill-defined charge of "religious extremism" for discussing ideas inimical to the government have not flagged in 2000. Violations of due process rights, vicious torture, long periods of incommunicado pre-trial detention, and sham trials clearly flout international human rights guarantees and are growing more, not less frequent.

In Kazakhstan, the government of President Nazarbaev has simply neglected to implement many of the recommendations made by the OSCE in the aftermath of the elections, and has backtracked on promises to introduce elections for governor made to the U.S. at the Joint Commission meetings held here in Washington D.C. in December. The government continues to harass and suppress the few remaining independent media outlets not controlled by the President's family. It uses criminal libel suits to close independent newspapers, and has engineered the dismissal of critical journalists using threats and intimidation. All those who take to the streets in public protest face the risk of prison.

Kyrgyzstan has experienced a dramatic regression to the most repressive practices of its neighbors. During recent parliamentary elections, opposition figures were kept off the ballot, or eliminated through blatant fraud. With presidential elections still scheduled for December 2000, President Akaev has imprisoned one of his leading opponents, the former Vice President, Feliks Kulov, and ensured that the other one will be disqualified from the ballot. Independent media and NGOs have come under increasing pressure in the election period, while demonstrators protesting electoral fraud have been arrested and beaten.

The U.S. Response So Far

If 1999 was a test of the Central Asian countries' commitment to democracy, it was also a test of U.S. Central Asia policy.

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, democracy promotion, coupled with economic development (particularly in the oil and gas sector) and security assistance has been the administration's recipe for stability in the region.

After the elections of 1999-2000, however, the impasse in democratization has not been accompanied by a parallel slowdown in other areas of these bilateral relationships. The case of Kyrgyzstan demonstrates how this failure to maintain the linkage between all facets of U.S. policy works against the very progress the U.S. aims to promote.

Just after the arrest of Feliks Kulov, one of Kyrgyzstan's most respected journalists, Zamira Sydykova, reported on her conversation with a senior Kyrgyz government official. This official, an advisor to President Akaev, dismissed OSCE and U.S. criticism of Kyrgyzstan's electoral violations. He gave the rationale that during the elections last year in Kazakhstan, that country was also criticized but suffered no concrete ill effects. In addition, this official cited continued U.S. aid flows to Kyrgyzstan at the same time as critical statements were emanating from the Department of State as proof that there was no consistent U.S. policy towards human rights violations in the region. Surely this reasoning must have played a role in the decision to jail President Akaev's leading opponent.

We draw the conclusion that critical rhetoric alone is clearly not enough to promote real change, especially

when criticism is undercut by the extension of significant benefits, whether through aid, taxpayer-funded Ex-Im Bank loan guarantees, or support for international lending institutions' activity. The U.S. must make continued economic and political support to the countries of Central Asia conditional on their introduction of real democratic reform.

The current administration, however, is moving farther away from aid conditionality on human rights grounds. Military and security issues are beginning to take center stage, as the recent visits to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan by F.B.I. Director Freeh and C.I.A. director George Tennen attest. The Secretary of State's trip to the region has been presented as the inauguration of this new, "expanded" relationship. Rumors suggest that all of the countries the Secretary will visit will be certified by the State Department to receive military assistance under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, although the Department of State itself recognizes that Uzbekistan systematically and egregiously violates its citizens basic rights.

The sad irony is that, as many observers of the region and political scientists note, neither the thoroughgoing market reforms and flourishing commercial ties, nor the external and internal stability which the U.S. aims to support with this enhanced assistance can be achieved without democratization and respect for the rule of law.

The U.S. must reject the arguments of Central Asian states requesting indulgence of their anti-democratic practices, pleading dangers of Islamic radicalism and other risks to security, as self-serving and counterproductive. Citizens will reject the call of extremism only in societies where broad sectors of the population feel that the government is responsive to, and adequately protects their interests.

Conclusion

Central Asia's democratization and progress towards the protection of human rights is in the United States' best interest, not only because these are the core values of this nation, but also because democracy and the rule of law are necessary for lasting development and stability in this crucial region. Human Rights Watch urges Congress to ensure that this record of anti-democratic measures and persistent human rights violations does have, and will have negative consequences for each of these countries' relations with the United States.

**Statement of The Honorable Christopher H. Smith, Chairman
Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights
April 12, 2000**

Hearing on Democracy in the Central Asian Republics

I am pleased that we are able to conduct this joint hearing on the state of democracy in the Central Asia Republics. As you know, Mr. Chairman, I introduced last Fall H.Con.Res. 204, voicing concern about the serious violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in most states of Central Asia. Much has transpired in the region since the time of introduction, and I am eager for us to schedule mark up and floor consideration on the measure as soon as we return from the Easter recess.

The Secretary of State is traveling to Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the coming days, and Members of the Helsinki Commission (the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe) which I chair joined me in sending a letter last week to Secretary Albright urging her to raise a number of human rights and democratization issues in her talks with authorities in the region. I would ask that the letter be made a part of the record.

In general, the state of democratization and human rights in the countries of Central Asia is a source of serious concern, frustration and disappointment. Over the past year, the Commission has conducted a series of hearings on the countries of the region. The five newly independent states of Central Asia were admitted to the OSCE in 1992, after freely accepting all commitments contained in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents. Let us not forget that each of the leaders, having signed the OSCE documents, has personally acknowledged “democracy as the only system of government for our nations” and committed themselves to foster democratization by holding free and fair elections, to promote freedom of the media, and to observe human rights.

Some eight years later, these countries remain independent, sovereign entities, but in much of Central Asia, the commitments have been slighted. Central Asian leaders give every indication of intending to remain in office for life, and Western capitals – though dutifully pressing the leaders to observe OSCE commitments – seem to have accepted this unpleasant reality as unalterable. Throughout the region, fundamental freedoms are ignored while leaders entrench themselves and their families in power and wealth.

Mr. Chairman, the deterioration of democracy, the lack of the rule of law and the violations of human rights seriously jeopardize genuine stability in the region and are contrary to U.S. interests. I would strongly suggest that our interests can only be advanced through the promotion of democratic principles where officials are accountable to the electorate and justice is administered impartially.

I look forward to the testimony which will be presented today. I will appreciate hearing from our witnesses their recommendations on how best we advance U.S. interests in the region, and help foster respect for human rights, democracy and genuine rule of law.

Statement by Congressman Dana Rohrabacher
H. Con. Res. 295
Human Rights Violations in Vietnam 25 After the End of the War

April 12, 2000

Mr. Chairman:

I would like to thank Mr. Bereuter, himself a Vietnam-era veteran, and ranking Member Mr. Lantos, for expediting a mark-up of this resolution as we approach the 25th anniversary of the fall of end of the Vietnam War. The amendment calls attention to ongoing human rights violations and the need for democracy for the people of Vietnam.

During the Indochina Conflict, some 58,000 Americans perished and more than 300,000 were wounded in defense of freedom for the people of Vietnam and the Asia Pacific region. In addition, some 270,350 South Vietnamese military personnel perished and 570,600 were wounded before the 1975 Final Offensive by communist forces.

This resolution honors their sacrifices by calling attention to the cause of freedom in Vietnam. The intent of this resolution is entirely in support of the people of Vietnam who deserve the opportunity to participate in a democratic process in a democratic society.

The greatest example of the potential in Vietnam is to see the tremendous educational and economic success of the Vietnamese-American community, such as in the Little Saigon area of my California District. Most of these families arrived in the United States with little more than the shirts on their back. The decisive difference between their success and the poverty and underdevelopment in their homeland is democracy and freedom. We wish that for all people of Vietnam.

In addition, this resolution congratulates the Vietnamese-American community for initiating and funding through private donations the first memorial to honor both American and South Vietnamese military personnel who sacrificed their lives during the war, which is being developed in Orange County, California.

The findings of this resolution are consistent with the State Department's annual Human Rights Reports of 1999 and 2000. It requests that our Government makes clear to the Government of Vietnam America's the need for political, religious and economic freedom for the Vietnamese people.

The resolution also urges the Vietnamese regime to commit to a framework and set a timetable for open and fair elections. Twenty-five years after the end of the war, it is finally time for the Vietnamese leaders to make peace with their own people, and to permit their citizens to

peacefully choose their own local and national leaders, without fear or intimidation.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this bi-partisan resolution which honors the sacrifice of American citizen-soldiers who perished for the cause of freedom during the Indochina conflict by supporting the struggle for democracy in Vietnam.

OPENING STATEMENT
OF THE
HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA
AT THE JOINT HEARING ON
DEMOCRACY IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS
FOR THE
HOUSE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ASIA-PACIFIC AFFAIRS, AND THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS
APRIL 12, 2000

CHAIRMAN BEREUTER AND CHAIRMAN SMITH:

I WANT TO COMMEND YOU FOR CALLING THIS IMPORTANT HEARING TO EXAMINE THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY FOR THE 50 MILLION CITIZENS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS, AND I WELCOME THE DISTINGUISHED WITNESSES TO TESTIFY ON THIS MATTER BEFORE OUR COMMITTEE TODAY.

THE UNITED STATES HAS MAJOR NATIONAL INTERESTS IN PROMOTING STABLE, DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS IN THESE FORMER SOVIET STATES, WHILE ENSURING THAT THE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS OF AMERICAN ECONOMIC INVESTMENTS IN OIL AND GAS PROJECTS IN THE REGION ARE PROTECTED.

ALTHOUGH THE PROMISE OF DEMOCRACY FOR THESE NEW NATIONS WAS VIBRANT IN THE BEGINNING, IT IS DISTURBING THAT THE LEADERS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS HAVE SHOWN THEMSELVES INCREASINGLY TO BE AUTHORITARIAN. FREE AND FAIR PRESIDENTIAL AND PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS HAVE NOT BEEN HELD, WHILE GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION IS ENDEMIC, AND ACCOMPANIED BY THE STEADY EROSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTIONS.

GIVEN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS ARE DISSATISFIED AND SUFFER FROM A LOW STANDARD OF LIVING. THE RESULTING SOCIAL UNREST THREATENS TO FUEL THE RISE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND ETHNIC CONFLICT, AND HAS PROMPTED THE CENTRAL ASIAN GOVERNMENTS TO SEEK CLOSER TIES WITH RUSSIA FOR STABILITY.

I FIND THESE DEVELOPMENTS TO BE VERY DISTURBING AND AM HOPEFUL THAT SECRETARY OF STATE ALBRIGHT WILL SUCCESSFULLY ADDRESS THESE CONCERNS WHILE MEETING WITH LEADERS IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS (OF KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN AND UZBEKISTAN) NEXT WEEK.

THANK YOU AND I LOOK FORWARD TO THE TESTIMONY OF OUR WITNESSES ON THESE MATTERS.

COMMISSION ON
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April 7, 2000

The Honorable Madeleine Korbet Albright
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madame Secretary:

As you prepare to embark on your trip to Central Asia, we are writing to share with you our views and concerns over disturbing developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. In addition, we respectfully offer several specific suggestions which we urge you to act upon while in these countries.

In general, the state of democratization and human rights in the countries of Central Asia is a source of serious concern, frustration and disappointment. Over the past year, the Commission has conducted a series of hearings on the countries of the region. The five newly independent states of Central Asia were admitted to the OSCE in 1992, after freely accepting all commitments contained in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE documents. In fact, each of the leaders you are scheduled to meet personally acknowledged "democracy as the only system of government for our nations" and committed themselves to foster democratization by holding free and fair elections, to promote freedom of the media, and to observe human rights.

Some eight years later, these countries remain independent, sovereign entities, but in much of Central Asia, the commitments they promised to implement are a dead letter. The constant argument made by regional leaders and their lobbyists in Washington that matters are progressing, perhaps too slowly for American tastes, towards democracy is entirely unconvincing. In fact, in some of these countries, the situation has actually deteriorated rather than improved over time.

Madame Secretary, Central Asian leaders give every indication of intending to remain in office for life, and Western capitals – though always dutifully pressing them to observe OSCE commitments – seem to have accepted this unpleasant reality as unalterable. But these presidents' desire for unlimited and permanent power means that they cannot tolerate democracy, the rule of law and human rights, as doing so would create a level playing field for challengers and allow the media to shine a light on presidential misdeeds and high-level corruption. The result has been an entire region in the OSCE space where fundamental freedoms are ignored while leaders entrench themselves and their families in power and wealth. With the passage of time, today's leaders and their relatives will only tighten their grip, creating family dynasties in fact, if not in name.

The deterioration of democracy, the lack of the rule of law and the violations of human rights seriously jeopardize genuine stability in the region and are contrary to U.S. interests. Indeed, such interests can only be advanced through the promotion of democratic principles where officials are accountable to the electorate and justice is administered impartially.

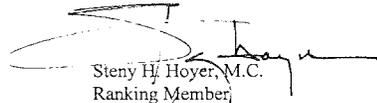
In all candor, the leaders of Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan appear convinced that American interests in the region, and the fear of Islamic fundamentalism, will keep the United States from pressing them too hard on democratization and human rights and will shield them from any consequences while they consolidate personal power. It is critical to disabuse them of this notion. We urge you to publicly and forthrightly address the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law while in each of these OSCE states.

While they surely face genuine security threats, including the danger of radical Islamic groups, repressive policies have exacerbated an otherwise manageable problem. This applies especially to Uzbekistan, where President Karimov's sweeping campaign against pious Muslims is swelling the ranks of the disaffected and promises to create a permanent crisis that will be used as the pretext for permanent repression.

Finally, we urge you to resist growing pressure within OSCE to accommodate the wishes of Central Asian regimes to shift the OSCE's programmatic attention from human rights – which they find an unpleasant intrusion – to other fields. We are convinced this would be a dangerous error. By yielding to such wishes, without seeing any substantive progress on democratization and human rights, the United States would allow attention to be diverted from the most crucial issues bearing on our national interests. We urge you to resist such folly.

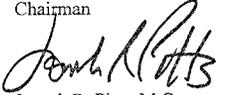
Madame Secretary, considering these sobering realities, we have included in the attachment a number of specific goals you might pursue during your upcoming trip. We have noted a number of specific areas where progress is possible and necessary in the three countries you will visit. We hope these ideas and suggestions will give you food for thought and a guide to action. As Members of the Commission, we wish you success and look forward to hearing about your trip after your return.

Sincerely,


Steny H. Hoyer, M.C.
Ranking Member


Michael P. Forbes, M.C.


Christopher H. Smith, M.C.
Chairman


Joseph R. Pitts, M.C.

**Highlights of Concern Regarding Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan
April 2000**

Kazakhstan

In Kazakhstan, which seemed on the right track in the early 1990s, President Nazarbaev has flagrantly flouted OSCE commitments on the holding of free and fair elections, while his family members seize control of the country's media outlets. The opposition newspaper *XXI Vek* has come under intense harassment and censorship by the authorities and most recently has been forced to suspend normal publication.

With the cycle of farcical elections over for the foreseeable future, the best way to promote democratization in Kazakhstan involves setting up an independent printing press. Ambassador Jones is aware of congressional support for the idea, and the Commission has been in touch with State Department personnel about how the United States could best pursue it. We hope you will raise this issue with President Nazarbaev, who would be hard pressed to disapprove, and instruct your associates in the Department to seek the most appropriate and expeditious way to proceed.

Second, with such deep distrust between the government and opposition, organizing a national dialogue between them could be a very useful idea. Kazak officials have announced plans to hold a round-table in May with the public's participation, including opposition parties and NGOs, on the question of improving the electoral system and the course of democratic reforms in the republic. It would add greatly to the initiative's prospects for success if opposition leader Akezhan Kazhegeldin could attend in person. As you know, he lives in England and will not return to his country without guarantees of his security.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's President Akaev, once the fondest hope of reformers, orchestrated the recent parliamentary election and demonstrated his determination to eliminate any challengers. The recent arrest of Felix Kulov, as well as the violent dispersion of demonstrators, signals an attempt to intimidate society in advance of the upcoming presidential election.

Given Kyrgyzstan's previous record and the hopes it engendered, no country in Central Asia is more disappointing. The February-March parliamentary election made plain President Akaev's intention to pursue the regional pattern of falsifying elections and keeping non-communist parties and rivals from running against him, a la Nazarbaev. The recent arrest of Felix Kulov and Daniyar Usenov are blatantly political, and we encourage you to urge their immediate release.

Against this background, a national dialogue is needed in Kyrgyzstan as well, where officials have also stated their support for the dialogue. We hope you will convey to President Akaev that continuing on his present path could well result in civil strife and instability in Kyrgyzstan and that the United States expects much more from him. For your information, the Helsinki Commission is planning hearings on Kyrgyzstan later this year, and we intend to look very closely at U.S. assistance to Kyrgyzstan, given the severe backsliding on democratization.

In an attempt to muzzle independent press and journalists, the Akaev administration has initiated a series of costly libel suits against *Res Publika*, *Asaba*, and *Vercherny Bishkek*. *Res Publika* has been forced to cease publication recently by the authorities who have imposed stiff fines against the weekly. We urge you to call upon President Akaev to end this campaign of intimidation against the independent media in Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan

Opposition political activity was permitted in Uzbekistan in the late 1980s, and an opposition leader was even able to run for president in the December 1991 election. In mid-1992, however, President Karimov evidently decided to ban any manifestation of dissidence. Since then, no opposition movements have been allowed to function openly, and the state controls society as tightly as during the Soviet era.

Given the nature of the Uzbek regime, it may be unrealistic to hope for the registration of opposition political parties, though surely you will raise this matter with President Karimov. But there is no reason for him not to register independent human rights monitoring groups. In 1996, Karimov promised Audrey Glover, then-Director of the ODIHR, to register the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan. He has not done so. Today, the Society, as well as the Independent Human Rights Organization, exist, though their functioning has been impaired by a series of arrests and beatings. We encourage you to meet with them – to bolster their spirits and offer them some protection from a violent regime – and convey to President Karimov that the United States is keenly interested in their being registered.

Second, with hundreds, if not thousands, of people jailed for their beliefs on trumped-up charges, it is difficult to know how many prisoners of conscience there are in Uzbekistan. We must plead the cases of human rights monitors who have been arrested on the basis of false or planted evidence. These include Ismail Adylov, Makhbuba Kasymova and Meli Kobilov. A strong argument for their release could convince President Karimov to do so.

Religious believers of various faiths are routinely abused by law-enforcement officers and subjected to beatings, torture, psychological pressure, threats of violence against their families and deprivation of their legal rights. The 1998 Law on Religion and the amendments to the criminal code, despite strong international criticism, remain in force and violate Uzbekistan's OSCE commitments to religious liberty. Representatives from the Uzbek Government assured us last fall that a roundtable was to be organized early this year by the Ombudsman to consider changes to the law. This has not yet been done. We urge you to stress the importance of fundamental, systemic change in Uzbek policies and laws affecting religious groups.

In September 1999, we welcomed the release of the five evangelical Protestants and one Jehovah Witness from prison. But Tashkent's policies toward all religious groups continue to cause concern. Lack of registration and other bureaucratic obstacles remain for Baptists in Urgench and Tashkent, and religious believers continue to be subjected to arbitrary arrest, as occurred to Nikolai Andreus in Tashkent in December 1999. The Uzbek Bible Society continues to encounter bureaucratic obstacles to its activities which are well within the purview of the OSCE commitments.

The current campaign against religious Muslims is radicalizing segments of the population, particularly the younger generation. The methods employed in combating terrorism violate basic human rights, and these policies will backfire. Planting of narcotics or illegal literature on individuals, forcing confessions in police custody, and torturing suspects will not win peace for Uzbekistan and are never justified, even for suspected terrorists.

Finally, Uzbekistan continues to impose lengthy prison sentences against journalists and exercises strict controls on mass media. Muhammad Bekjanov, Iusuf Ruzimuradov, and Shadi Mariev, are each serving prison sentences of between 11 and 15 years stemming from their professional activities. Mr. Mariev's plight is of particular concern given his poor health. We urge you to raise the issue of government censorship with President Karimov and seek the unconditional release of these imprisoned journalists.

HP079444

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PRODUCT(S): MINING MACHINERY & EQUIPMENT
REQUESTED LOAN/GTEE AMOUNT (EXCL EXPOSURE FEE): \$ 23,800,000
APPLICANT: NATIONAL BANK OF UZBEKISTAN
EXPORTER : CATERPILLAR INC
BUYER: NAVOI MINING & METALLURGICAL COMPLEX
END-USER: NAVOI MINING & METALLURGICAL COMPLEX
SUPPLIER: CATERPILLAR INC
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BORROWER: NATIONAL BANK OF UZBEKISTAN
GUARANTOR: MINST OF FINANCE

Sent to J. Windus 5/20/99 (at)

STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE:
POLITICAL CLEARANCE Lawrence Connell DATE: 5-12-99
HUMAN RIGHTS CLEARANCE L. Arthur Agnew DATE: 5/18/99

REQUEST FOR STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE

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PRODUCT(S): GRID CASTING EQUIPMENT

REQUESTED LOAN/GTEE AMOUNT (EXCL EXPOSURE FEE): \$ 45,952,483

APPLICANT: BANK OF NEW YORK (INC)

EXPORTER : AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY GROUP LTD.

BUYER: UZ - EXIDE

END-USER: UZ - EXIDE

SUPPLIER: EXIDE CORPORATON

BORROWER: NATL BANK FOR FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

GUARANTOR: MINST OF FINANCE

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STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE:

POLITICAL CLEARANCE Lawrence Connell DATE: 5-28-99

HUMAN RIGHTS CLEARANCE L. Arthur 6/3/99 DATE: _____

approve

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COUNTRY: TURKMENISTAN

PRODUCT(S): PAPER PRODUCTION MACHINERY

REQUESTED LOAN/GTEE AMOUNT (EXCL EXPOSURE FEE): \$ 115,098,500

APPLICANT: SOCIETE GENERALE

EXPORTER : CETLIN, INC

BUYER: CORPORATION KUWAT

END-USER: CORPORATION KUWAT

SUPPLIER: VOITH SULZER PAPER TECHNOLOGY

BORROWER: STATE BANK FOR FOREIGN ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

GUARANTOR: CABINET OF MINISTERS OF TURKMENISTAN

STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE:

POLITICAL CLEARANCE L. Marshi OK

DATE: 1/12/98

HUMAN RIGHTS CLEARANCE D. Carter approve

DATE: 1/2/98

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF THE UNITED STATES
REQUEST FOR STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE

DATE 06/11/98
CASE NO AP073585XX

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COUNTRY: UZBEKISTAN

PRODUCT(S): ---RELATED SPARE PARTS & LUBRICANTS

REQUESTED LOAN/GTEE AMOUNT (EXCL EXPOSURE FEE): \$ 52,265,820

APPLICANT: NATIONAL BANK OF UZBEKISTAN

EXPORTER : CASE CORPORATION

BUYER: UZSELKHOZSNABREMONT

END-USER: UZSELKHOZSNABREMONT

SUPPLIER: CASE CORPORATION

BORROWER: NATIONAL BANK OF UZBEKISTAN

GUARANTOR: MINST OF FINANCE

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STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE:

POLITICAL CLEARANCE *L. C. Connell*

DATE: 6-15-98

HUMAN RIGHTS CLEARANCE *P. Arthur Appene*

DATE: 6/17/98

WINDUS
4/29/99

EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF THE UNITED STATES
REQUEST FOR STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE

DATE 04/13/99
CASE NO AP074849X

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COUNTRY: UZBEKISTAN

PRODUCT(S): 400 CASE III "MAGNUM" TRACTORS

REQUESTED LOAN/GTEE AMOUNT (EXCL EXPOSURE PER): \$ 61,370,598

APPLICANT: NATL BANK FOR FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

EXPORTER : CASE CORPORATION

BUYER: UZSELKHOZSNABREMONT

END-USER: UZSELKHOZSNABREMONT

SUPPLIER: CASE CORPORATION

BORROWER: NATL BANK FOR FOREIGN ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

GUARANTOR: MINST OF FINANCE

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STATE DEPARTMENT CLEARANCE:

POLITICAL CLEARANCE LARRY CONNELL

DATE: 4-16-99

HUMAN RIGHTS CLEARANCE R. G. ... APPROVE

DATE: 4/19/99