

THE UZBEKISTAN CRISIS: ASSESSING THE IMPACT AND NEXT STEPS

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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JUNE 29, 2005

COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE
WASHINGTON, DC

The hearing was held at 2:12 p.m. in room 124, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC, Senator Sam Brownback, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Commissioners present: Hon. Sam Brownback, Chairman, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; Hon. Joseph R. Pitts, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe; and Hon. Robert B. Aderholt, Commissioner, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Witnesses present: Galima Bukharbaeva, Correspondent, Institute for War and Peace Reporting; Marcus Bensmann, Correspondent, Neue Zuercher Zeitung; Holly Cartner, Executive Director, Europe & Central Asia Division, Human Rights Watch; Robert Templar, Director, Asia Program, International Crisis Group; and Muhammad Salih, Chairman, Erk Party.

HON. SAM BROWNBACK, CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Mr. BROWNBACK. Good afternoon. The hearing's going to come to order. Thank you all for joining us today.

We were hoping to have Mira Ricardel, the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, testify today, as well as the Department of State. However, we have not been able to work out an arraignment, but hope to have both State and Department of Defense address the critical issues facing us in Uzbekistan at some future time.

I do have a longer statement I'm going to go ahead and put in the record, but I just want to make a few remarks as we get this hearing going.

For many years, I've been hoping for gradual democratization in Uzbekistan. Nearly 15 years now after the collapse of the USSR, Uzbekistan's political system under President Karimov today still retains many of the Soviet characteristics. Neither political nor economic reforms have taken place despite repeated calls for President Karimov to begin this process, which I personally have extended and asked President Karimov to do, as well.

This Commission over the years has held several hearings, as well as issued reports on the situation in Uzbekistan. We have con-

sistently urged President Karimov to reform. His failure to do so is one of the main reasons, I believe, why the tragedy occurred in Andijon in early May.

And these protests will continue, I believe. And the violence will continue if President Karimov does not take dramatic and decisive actions, which include an independent investigation of the events in Andijon. Along with the U.S. Government, the European Parliament, the OSCE, and many international organizations, the Helsinki Commission has urged President Karimov to permit such an independent international investigation.

He has refused to do so, suggesting that we rely on the conclusions of a parliamentary commission of investigation. Unfortunately, given the absence of meaningful separation of powers in Uzbekistan, we cannot place any faith in that commission, whose conclusions will surely echo those already pronounced by President Karimov.

It is essential that an internationally accepted account of the events be established. The OSCE is the best form for organizing such an inquiry. For that reason, I am suggesting that the United States invoke the Moscow Mechanism.

Though perhaps unfamiliar to many people, the Moscow Mechanism is so named because it was agreed to by all Participating states at the OSCE meeting in Moscow in 1991. It is an instrument available to the OSCE to investigate extraordinary events or serious, ongoing human rights violations in a member state. The Moscow Mechanism allows the state involved to name a rapporteur and have input in the report.

I hope President Karimov will rethink his opposition to an independent investigation. I do not, however, hold out a great deal of hope that he will do so.

So today, Uzbekistan presents Washington with a classical dilemma. The leader of a dictatorial state in a strategically important, resource-rich region wants cooperation and to be a friend of the United States. He cooperates with us on security matters, allowing us to use a military base.

He claims to be pursuing an agenda of gradual democratization, occasionally making some gestures, yet he allows no fundamental reforms of his own repressive policies at home, contradicts OSCE values, alienates the population, and undermines the country's stability. Nor is there any reason to expect any change while President Karimov is ruling.

How long can we work with such a leader without damaging our own interest? Are we risking long-term losses for short-term gains? Are we strengthening terrorism or fighting it by aligning ourselves with President Karimov?

To address these questions, we've assembled our group of well-qualified witnesses. I'm disappointed that we were not able to get administration witnesses for this hearing. However, we have with us a number of important witnesses, including two reporters who were in Andijon at the time of the shootings and in the aftermath.

Before identifying them, I should note that we did invite the Uzbek Embassy to testify at this hearing, but Uzbek authorities chose not to attend. I would also state that I have attempted personally to call President Karimov, and my call has been rejected.

I've attempted to work with the Uzbek Government, and those efforts have been rejected, as well.

We will have a panel of five witnesses, whom we would like to have come forward. And we start, actually, with the testimony with the two eyewitnesses reporters. But if I could have all five come forward and take your seats at the table, I would appreciate it.

While they're taking their place, other members of the Commission will be coming. Congressman Pitts is here.

Congressman, I don't know if you have an opening statement that you would like to make? If you would, we'd be pleased to receive that at this time.

**HON. JOSEPH R. PITTS, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION ON
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for holding this important hearing. I think it's vital that we and other nations continue to fight against terror and that we ensure that fundamental human rights are not violated.

And of course, like everyone, we're deeply disturbed by events that have occurred in Central Asia. I look forward to the insight and analysis that today's witnesses will provide.

I do think it would be important to hear from the Government of Uzbekistan to get their view, especially on the involvement of the terrorist groups in the events that occurred there.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Thank you, Congressman.

I do want to go to the two eyewitnesses first on this. So we'll have the two reporters that were present speak first on this panel. I want to apologize ahead of time if I mispronounce your names. I'm best with Sam, and Smiths, and Lees, and these names are not such, but I do appreciate very much your being here and my lack of being able to enunciate your name correctly is no reflection on how much we do appreciate your coming.

Galima Bukharbaeva, since 2005, she has been project director for the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting. Born in Tashkent, she graduated from State University in Tashkent, Journalism Faculty. From 1997 to '98, she worked for Internews Network, an American NGO supporting independent media, as a correspondent and training coordinator. From 1998 to 2003, she was a correspondent for AFP in Uzbekistan. Her articles on Andijon events have been reprinted in numerous sources.

And so I would turn to you first for your statement for the Commission.

**GALIMA BUKHARBAEVA, CORRESPONDENT, INSTITUTE FOR
WAR AND PEACE REPORTING**

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. Thank you very much.

I would like to thank you, Senator Brownback, and other distinguished members of this Commission for giving me this opportunity to testify about the massacre in Andijon on May 13th, where I was myself with my other colleagues, journalists, among the people from Andijon.

I am Galima Bukharbaeva, a journalist from Uzbekistan. I work as a country director of the Uzbekistan Project for IWPR in Uzbekistan since 2000.

I was in Bobur Square in Andijon among thousands of Andijon citizens, when, at 5:20 p.m. local time on May 13th, the merciless authorities of Uzbekistan opened fire on their own people. Before the attack, the government didn't warn unarmed people to leave the square.

Thousands of people were unarmed, and they were not forced by rebels to stay on the place. Everybody we spoke to came to the square by his own will, either only to look or to protest. It wasn't an Islamic uprising. I didn't hear any "Allahu Akbar" outcries or any demands to build Islamic state. People demanded justice, human rights, economical, and social, and political reforms.

And the monument of Bobur, which was in the center of the square—it was full of people. The monument itself, it became a tribune for all speakers. These demonstrations and some of the speeches were continued from the moment when I arrived to the square at 12 o'clock p.m. and until 5 o'clock when fire was opened.

And the people, they didn't have even political demands, and they didn't call for resignation of President Karimov. I didn't see any foreign fighters, mujahedeens from Chechnya or Afghanistan. The armed people belonged to the group of friends and relatives of 23 businessmen, who were arrested a year before and were on trial in Andijon city court since February 2005.

At the time of the government's attack, there were no shootings from the rebels' side or any aggressions from their side. All armed person were inside the Governor's office or in the yard of the buildings, surrounded by the fence.

A huge demonstration of Andijon unarmed citizens was taking place on the square. The government's troops attacked completely unexpectedly for everybody who was at that moment on the main square of Andijon.

The shooting of Andijon citizens, everyone who was on the square that time—children, teenagers, women, old people, journalists—took place in cold blood without mercy or pity. It was just simply professional mass murder.

One of the soldiers also tried to kill me. A bullet from his weapon hit my rucksack, which was on my back when I tried to escape from this bullet, and went through it, passing through my notebook and my journalistic identity card.

I can even show you. This is my notebook. And the bullet went through this and my press card. And also, I have my rucksack where you can see the front bullet. And I was really lucky, because bullet left my rucksack from this side. It was the question of a few centimeters.

During the shooting, when I fled in terror from bullets along with the other people, I felt a real animal fear. I had never been so scared in my life before. The bullets fell on us like hail, and I saw people who were running next to me falling down.

It seemed that all of Andijon had been turned into a slaughterhouse, and all its inhabitants turned to cannon fodder. President Islam Karimov ignored the opinion of his people, the capital of the

most densely populated part of the region, Fergana Valley. He scorned the life of every person who was there.

And I will just very briefly try to explain to you why and how—my understanding of why this unrest happened. This unrest was closely connected with the trial of 23 businessmen charged with belonging to the religious organization Akromiya. The hearing of this case finished at the Andijon city court on May 11th, and the court withdrew to deliver a sentence.

These 23 businessmen were arrested in summer 2004. Over the year they were detained in a cellar of National Security Service in Andijon and were tortured. Their families and lawyers tried all legal acts to prove that they are not guilty.

The last press-conference was held in Tashkent on May 3rd, 10 days before this massacre in Andijon. And it was at Freedom House office in Tashkent.

And what is interesting, on May 11th, just 2 days before the massacre, my colleague, Marcus, he was in Andijon. And he interviewed the prosecutor. He was very interesting. He was asking for a 6-, 7-year sentence for these defenders, businessmen.

And when Marcus asked, “What crime these people committed actually?” And they said, “Oh, they didn’t do anything yet.” “But you ask for 6 years. Don’t you think it’s very much for what they didn’t do or nothing?” “But anyway, we have to be careful. Just in case, we have to punish them.” So we have a tape of this interview included in his interview in my testimony documents, in English.

When we arrived to Andijon on Friday, on May 13th, we had a chance to speak to some leaders of this unrest. And one of them, Sharif Shakirov, his two brothers were among these 23 businessmen on trial, explained how it happened.

On the last 2 days of the court hearings, on 10 and 11th May, up to 5,000 people gathered outside the court building who came to express their support for the businessmen on trial. The crowd was so large because it was not ordinary people who were on trial, but successful businessmen, heads of various manufacturing companies.

These 23 businessmen provided jobs to 2,000 people. Their employees, friends, and relatives filled the entire park by the court building on Tuesday and Wednesday. Later, as Sharif Shakirov told us, it was revealed that, starting on Wednesday and Thursday, 11 and 12 May, the National Security Service arrested six people who were standing outside the court.

Though the city traffic police department started to arrest even cars who were parking in front of the court and which belonged to the families of these defendants. And as we found out later, the verdict was announced secretly on Thursday 12th May in a jail. And 23 businessmen got sentences from 12 to 22 years of imprisonment.

This exhausted their patience. And people began to gather and decided to go to the traffic police in the late evening, Thursday, May 12th. They gathered together and went backward to the traffic police department together in demand for their cars to be released. But they had no success at the traffic people.

They were very angry. And afterwards they went to the NSS, and also demanded to release the six new people who were ar-

rested. Of course, they couldn't release them. And after their attack on a military unit, and took weapons, and attacked [inaudible] security service, at that moment, as Sharif Shakirov told us, 30 people were killed. And they decided to go to prison and release prisoners in the prison.

When we asked Sharif Shakirov who was sitting in the Governor's office, "So what do you want? What demands do you have?" And he said that they demand truth and justice. He said that, in the morning, they had applied already to Russian President Vladimir Putin through the Reuters News Agency to regulate the conflict.

Evidently, they didn't imagine that Andijon citizens would help them, that the entire center would be blocked with cars in order to stop a storm by authorities. Because when we tried to go to the center of the square, all the square, all roads were blocked by cars. And I was thinking maybe police did this, but I didn't see any police or soldiers.

And as we understood later, that it was done by civilians, who tried to support these rebels inside the Governor's office. And when we asked these rebels, "What do you control at the moment?" they said, "We do not control anything. We're just sitting in this Governor's office."

And after we told them, "You know, all roads are blocked," "This what Andijon people do."

Later, we could speak with another leader, Kabuljon Parpiev. And he said that they had folks with the Interior Ministry Zakir Almatov. Parpiev said that also they didn't have any political demands and the only thing they want, the Uzbek Constitution to be observed, they want freedom and justice.

And they also asked if Interior Minister Zakir Almatov can release Akrom Yuldashev. This is a guy who wrote a book. He was accused that he is leader of this organization, Akromiya. According to Parpiev, Yuldashev didn't create any organization, but wrote a book which became a spiritual guide for many of them.

In the afternoon, again, they had a call from Interior Minister Almatov. This time, Almatov said that it would not be possible to free Yuldashev, as the judge is against it. Then, said Parpiev, the minister began making threats.

"He told us that there would be a storm anyway. He said that even if they had to kill 300, 1,400 people, they would take the rebels," Parpiev told us.

I asked Parpiev if he was afraid. And he was looking in my eyes and he said, "Can you call this life? It's better to die." And everybody who was in the Governor's office in that moment, there was—I had a feeling that all of them had made decision to die, because they said it's not a life anyway. It's better to die.

I went out and started interviewing people on the square. At that moment, square was full of people. I can't say how many. Some people were saying 20,000, but I believe that not less than 10,000. It was really full. The square was like 200 meters long, but it was full of people.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Ms. Bukharbaeva, if I could, I've got to vote. What I would like to do is for you to go ahead with your testimony.

And then, Mr. Bensmann, if you could proceed with your testimony after that. I'll go vote and get back as quickly as I can. If I'm not back by the time you're done testifying, if Congressman Aderholt or Pitts would like to question those two witnesses, and then we'll proceed to the rest of the panel. That would keep us going and flowing on forward.

So please proceed with your statement.

And, Mr. Bensmann, as an eyewitness, please testify as well, if you could. And if I'm not back by then, two Congressman will go with questions. And then I'll get back for that. My apologies, but I've got to slip out to a vote.

Please proceed.

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. So I was continuing interviewing people. It was almost 5 o'clock. At the moment, I think it was 5:10 or maybe 5:20.

I saw that on the main avenue, which is like going along the square, a few APCs, armored personal carriers, with two or three vehicles driving one after another.

People were frightened and began running. And I also ran, but an APC drove past at a very high speed. But literally 2 minutes later, a new line of APCs appeared. As they drove up to the square, they opened fire without warning. And everyone ran. I also ran.

The bullets flew at such a rate that it seemed hail was falling on all sides. When the shooting began, I was 5 meters from this avenue. But it's hard to say how many people were killed on May 13-14 in Andijon. Andijon is in fear now, and no one can speak. Even people cannot complain that they lost relatives or someone was killed in their family.

Uzbek Government does everything to hide this massacre, to destroy evidence. They repress people and journalists. They arrest even taxi drivers who served journalists, and other locals, who also helped journalists to work, stringers or fixers, and also human rights defenders who were also eyewitnesses of this massacre.

High official police source in Andijon just 2 weeks ago gave us secretly an interview. And he said that, that day were killed up to a few thousand people. He was eyewitness when governments tried to hide bodies in mass graves all over Uzbekistan, mostly in Fergana Valley. And I ask U.S. Government for help and assistance.

First, I ask President of USA, George Bush, to condemn this massacre. I ask U.S. Government to use all their pressure to convince Uzbek Government to let international commission to come to Uzbekistan for independent investigation. If Uzbek Government will not let this commission investigate events in Andijon, then I ask to start sanctions against Uzbek Government, reconsider your relations with Uzbekistan, limit or stop some kind of cooperation, including military, and even to remove an American airbase in Khanabad, Karshi.

I ask not to give U.S. visa to all members of Uzbek Government, if they will refuse in independent investigation. I ask U.S. Government to act through international organizations such as NATO, United Nations, OSCE for letting international commission come to Uzbekistan and to condemn massacre in Andijon.

And I ask to help the new Government of Kyrgyzstan to save lives of Uzbek refugees and to protect them from pressure from Uzbekistan. And I ask to help United Nations to send refugees as soon as possible to third countries.

I also ask to make clear statement that Uzbek Government shouldn't prevent work of local and international journalists in Uzbekistan and to stop repressions and abusing local journalists in the Uzbek press.

I ask for help to release as soon as possible human rights defenders, who were arrested after Andijon massacre. And I also ask for help and financial assistance for local human rights groups and journalists, who still doing great job in Uzbekistan, despite all threats.

So thank you very much.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you very much.

Mr. Bensmann?

**MARCUS BENSMANN, CORRESPONDENT, NEUE ZUERCHER
ZEITUNG**

Mr. BENSMANN. First of all, I would like to thank you that you are ready to hear my statement about what I saw in Andijon. My name is Marcus Bensmann, and I am working since 10 years in Central Asia, mainly for the Swiss newspaper Neue Zurcher Zeitung.

I was in Andijon 2 days before the massacre, because I wrote a story about this trial against the 23 businessmen in Andijon. And the interesting thing at this trial was—usually in Uzbekistan, this kind of trials are common. You have at least every week a trial against a person who has been accused of being a member of an Islamic terrorist group.

But in that case, the people allied with the defendants, the relatives, friends, and employees who worked in the companies, they stood up. They started to protest against this arrest and the trial. And they did it already for a year. And they used every method to make clear that the defendants are innocent.

And as I was there, there was quite an impressive picture. In front of this court, I counted in the evening more than 2,000 people, women, and men, and children, kids, young men, were standing in front of the court, saying nothing, no placards in their hands. There was only standing, and they had their best suits on.

I went inside the court. And I was present as the defendants were saying their last words. And you have to know, usually, if you have a trial against Islamic radicals in Uzbekistan, I observed two patterns. One, if the defendant is completely broken and confesses everything. Or you have defendant saying, "I'm not accepting this trial. I'm only believing in God, and we will buildup the Islamic state."

But in this case, these people were not broken, but they were defending themselves with the Constitution in their hand. They were defending themselves, quoting the President, and saying, "We are businessmen. We did what the President wanted to buildup our economy. We are not guilty. We are not members of any group."

And one even said, "It's absurd to turn men running a bakery, giving work to the people into a terrorist."

And also, they had high knowledge about their rights. They was demanding, "We don't have the opportunity to see our lawyers." Then they were saying that they were tortured to sign testimonies. And torture is common in Uzbekistan.

I went back at the same day to Tashkent and was really impressed about this kind of trial, because I hadn't seen it before. And just after the day I made this interview with this prosecutor asking him—because I was very impressed by this testimony of the defendants "What did these people commit?"

And they told me, "Nothing. They committed nothing. But we will put them in jail because they may in future do something." "And are they terrorists?" "No, they are not terrorists." "That they are making anti-constitutional statements?" "No." "But what is their guilt?" "Yes, they are members of this Islamic group."

And then I went back to Tashkent. And on Friday morning, I got the information that the uprising started. And we, together with Galima and two journalists from AP, we succeeded to sneak into the city in Andijon. The place is full of people.

And it was really interesting, because I also observed the uprising in Kyrgyzstan. And in Kyrgyzstan, that was people from the mountains, who were forced by the leaders of the clan to go into the city. But this, it was really a feeling of a city uprising. Everybody went on the street and participate in it.

And then they started to gather around this monument of Bobur, making speeches. But I didn't hear any "Allahu Akbar." I didn't hear any demands to build an Islamic state. And you know, I worked during the Tajik civil war. I worked in Afghanistan and recently also in Iraq. I know how these trained fighters looks like, but there weren't any.

These people who were armed in this night before freed [inaudible] the prisoners, and I haven't been there at that day in Andijon, therefore I do not know exactly what happened. But the people I saw who were armed, there were same people from Andijon—not well-trained Chechen Mujahedeen or Taliban.

But they were separated in this [inaudible] yard, which was surrounded by the fence. And there I saw mostly these armed people. And on the place, these meetings continued, people were making speeches, people camped.

You have to know Andijon is a provincial city, yes? If something happened, everybody is going to see what's going on. And even there was a rumor that Karimov is coming. They wanted to see Karimov, the President of Uzbekistan, to demand and say, "What's going wrong?" That means it was natural that the people was there.

And suddenly, 5 o'clock or 5:20, they started. These armed personal carrier passed by, soldiers sitting on the armed personal carriers, started to fire into the crowd. There was no warning before. They didn't give the people on the square the chance to run.

They could say, "In 10 minutes, we will shoot. Please leave the place." They could even wait 4 hours when it became dark and everybody went voluntarily home, because in the same evening was heavily raining. But they didn't give the people a chance.

And even—I would say—if it were even Osama bin Laden sitting in this Governor building, yes, at least he would give the people the

chance to go. And they were not forced to be there, because they went and camped. There were no armed people who said, "You have to be here."

And I was there—to see one APC by APC, and the soldiers were sitting and shooting. And we escaped. And the next day, we were forced to leave Andijon. But on Sunday, I snuck in again. And I had the chance to work another week there. That was very difficult, because every person was frightened by the secret service and the police inside.

But I succeeded to meet families, to go to funeral services. I succeeded to get from one person some death certification, where we had [inaudible] the number 372. I do not know. Maybe it's become higher, but that is the number which I have.

I saw a mass grave [inaudible] with the number 49. And then I had to leave also, because they arrested my stringer. But I went on Friday to the police station and said, "Give my man back." And I brought him back to Tashkent, and now he is safe in another country.

Thank you very much.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you very much, Mr. Bensmann, for your testimony, and Ms. Bukharbaeva.

In accordance with the instruction of the chairman, we will proceed to ask some questions, if that's OK, before going to the other witnesses.

Galima, I have a couple of questions. Some analysts see Andijon as Karimov's Tiananmen Square, if you will, a brutally violent gesture to intimidate any existing or potential opposition. And I suppose it could be argued that violence has worked for the Communist Party in China, which is still in power 15 years later.

What is your perspective regarding whether or not President Karimov deliberately ordered his troops to shoot to send a message? Do you think that can work in Uzbekistan like it worked in China? Give me your perspective.

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. I also agree that massacre in Andijon is possible to compare with Tiananmen Square tragedy. And it was the same, like shooting people without no mercy, without any chance for them to leave the square or to save their life.

And for me, as an Uzbek citizen, and for many people in Uzbekistan, I'm sure for the whole country, it was something like September 11th for America, because everything changed. Because, for instance, not as a journalist, but I'm just only like an Uzbek citizen, I can't imagine how it's possible to live in a country to know that your president, he's a murderer.

And because what happened in Andijon, it was mass murder. And I'm sure that the whole country, of course, is absolutely shocked. And they're afraid. But at the same time, in China after Tiananmen Square, there was also still possibility for economic reforms, yes? Countries thought it should grow very fast.

But in Uzbekistan, I'm sure that this government will not be able to provide economic reforms. And as long as this government will stay in power, so it will be country like really falling down. It will be in collapse. And it's really scary to think about the future of my country.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Bensmann, what's your perspective? Do you think Mr. Karimov deliberately ordered troops to shoot to send a message, or what's your perspective?

Mr. BENSMANN. He is saying that he supports everything, that he controlled every minute of the Andijon massacre. He's not naming it a massacre. He's even saying that everything happened 1 hour later. They even changed the time.

But it could be also that there is other theory—Uzbekistan is always like an old former Soviet country. You have [inaudible] the Minister of Internal Affairs, and the Minister of Security. And maybe even he was not so informed and they did something else, but Karimov, by himself, he is saying that “I am responsible for what's going on, and I have everything under control.” And therefore, you have to take him by his word.

Mr. PITTS. Now, a London-based scholar, Shirin Akiner, has written a report about Andijon, which concludes that the government version is much closer to reality than yours. Have you read her version? What do you think of it?

I'll ask both of you.

Mr. BENSMANN. I will point out two things of this report. First of all, she is saying in this report they started to shoot at 6:30. Is that right? But they start to shoot at 5:20. And I can prove it by wire. I can prove it even by my satellite-phone bill. That means she even changed the time, because Karimov was saying nothing was happened before 6.

And then she is giving her own testimony—I think it's the last page—saying, “We went to Andijon and “the deputy Hakim”—the is the Governor of the province—“met me and remained the whole day with me.” And she was there only 1 day.

I'll tell you. If you're invited by the Deputy Hakima in an Uzbek province, you have a very big lunch. You have a very big dinner. How could she make all these 40 interviews and in the presence of the deputy of the Governor? Every person will be frightened into saying only what the Governor wants to hear.

And I think, as she is a scholar, that is desperately against every, every ethic to be a scientist. And I hope that organizations cooperating with her, like NATO or Peace First, are rethinking their cooperation.

Mr. PITTS. Galima, would you like to respond?

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. Yes, I have the same idea, because Shirin Akiner, she was also like a PR person for the government. She was in Uzbekistan during elections, during this last year's elections, parliament elections, in December 2004, before the referendum and before for some important events, like EBRD meeting in Tashkent.

At that time, she all the time was doing this black PR for the government. But at that time, there was no blood. But now, when I see that she's doing this, on people's blood, when 1,000 people died, and she ignored their life, and now she tries to prove that this shooting, it was something they had to do, and wants to turn all peaceful people who were in the square to terrorists, it's something like I cannot accept at all.

Because she is saying that there were no shootings at peaceful civilians. Of course, they were shooting at me. Am I a terrorist or who am I? So I don't think so.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. One more question.

What is your opinion regarding whether or not the people of Uzbekistan perceive the U.S. military base as a powerful symbol of U.S. support for Karimov? What's your opinion of that?

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. If you talk to some analysts in Uzbekistan, they would say that, if not this support from USA to Karimov, maybe this president will now feel himself uncomfortable. It's very important to strengthen the power of President Karimov. This air-base is very tight military cooperation.

But at the same time, you know, people, like ordinary people, they still have hope that USA can help them. Because when they watch TV and see President George Bush in Tbilisi when he was there in the first week of May, when it was like a celebration of freedom, they think, "Why they did not do something like this in Tashkent? At least why they do not condemn violation of human rights of this terrible massacre?"

And even when before Andijon, there were terrible, terrible stories about this violation of human rights. And when I talk to people, usually they said, "Why does the international society keep silent? Where is America? Where is Europe?"

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Bensmann, do you want to comment?

Mr. BENSMANN. I think—first of all, I have been already for a long time in Central Asia. And Central Asia is an Islamic region. But you don't meet anti-Americanism there. The people like to be near to America or to Europe. They like to go there, yes?

They feel near to this country. And I think it's very difficult—as I'm a German, as Germany also has a military base in Germany, and I think it's very difficult to have freedom in a country which shoots its own people. This is a contradiction.

And in the end, I think that people know this, also, and if they see that America, or even Germany, is not responding to this, then all the words, you know, about supporting freedom, supporting democracy, they become nothing.

There was one point, when we came to Central Asia, the people would think, "Oh, people from the West, from Europe. We are safe," yes? I mean, the hope that they are coming from the west and they demand building up democracy. But I think our governments shouldn't send people into the fire and not protect them.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you. Your testimony has been very informative, and you're both very eloquent. Thank you.

Congressman Aderholt?

**HON. ROBERT B. ADERHOLT, COMMISSIONER, COMMISSION
ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Thank you each for being here. I've got another commitment at 3, so let me just ask one question before I have to leave.

It's pretty clear that the authorities in Uzbekistan have tried to cutoff foreign sources of information about, of course, what has happened there, and about some of the testimony you've talked about today. And of course, in general, our indication is, that they have censored different point of views about what has happened in Uzbekistan.

My question to both of you would be, how effective do you think that censorship has been? In other words, do people all over Uzbekistan know what's going on and what has been said about it by non-government sources?

Mr. BENSMANN. Can you repeat that?

Mr. ADERHOLT. Do the people of the Uzbekistan know what is going on, even though the government is trying to suppress news about what has, happened, through your testimony here today and through various other reports? In general, has the government managed to suppress that or do the people there know what is going on, even though they've tried to cover it up?

Mr. BENSMANN. I think in the first days after Andijon, the people didn't know, because there was only state TV and they also closed down the transmission of Russian TV. But still, radio, like BBC, German Wave [Deutsche Welle], and Radio Liberty, and Voice of America is heard. That means radio is a very important source for the people.

And then with the rumors that are going on, you are not able to hide this kind of massacre.

And even as I was a week later in Tashkent, I already felt that everybody and their brother in Tashkent was speaking about it. And they had a very clear picture what was going on there.

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. Yes. When we were leaving Andijon the next day, even people in the neighboring cities didn't know what happened. And they just surrounded us, asking what happened. And when we told them, of course, all people were really shocked that this really happened.

And after just a few days after, whole country knew already. Like my friends in Tashkent, they were saying that they're absolutely, deeply stressed and shocked. And even they were saying that streets were absolutely empty in the evening, even markets.

All people, they looked like they were just sitting in shock. And they were even afraid to go out, even to speak loudly. It was absolutely like whole country was turned to look like a prison, and they were afraid. And of course, it was deeply, deeply something terrible, a terrible experience for all people in Uzbekistan.

And I know, even people from, Uzbek police, whom I talked to, they were also shocked. And even some people from Uzbek Government, as I know from some friends, from sources, they were also—for them, it also something what they couldn't expect. They were also like really angry or deeply shocked at what happened.

But, yes, people know what happened.

Mr. ADERHOLT. One other thing. Is there any reason to believe that systemic reforms are possible in Uzbekistan under the current administration there?

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. I'm absolutely sure that this administration will not be able to provide any reforms. And this administration is the biggest obstacle for any reforms. And you can see that even such a huge organization like EBRD, IMF, they couldn't convince them to do something. And all they're doing is really very artificial.

And people, in Andijon, for instance, they had such simple demands, if you will see. Next day, this unrest was in Karasuu in Kyrgyzstan. And the first thing people started to do, was to rebuild the bridge broken by government on January 2003 because govern-

ment didn't want us Uzbek people to go to Kyrgyzstan for shopping because some prices are lower.

And they broke the bridge that one night. And now, 2 years ago, when it was just one shot for people to do something, they started to rebuild bridge. I don't think that it has anything to do with Islamic terrorism. It's such a simple thing.

And even just only one thing I can show you, this is a letter. And this is blood from Andijon. And this letter, it was written from one, I think, according to text—it wasn't signed—by one guy who was released from the prison, these 23 businessmen. And I included, also, in English translation on this letter.

The first thing these people saying is just economic, social problems. And even in their last letter, they're still saying that they're not Akromiya, that organization, this Islamic organization does not exist. They just were businessmen, and several from the government decided to take their business. That's why they were arrested. And if you read this letter, it's really impressive. This is like a voice from Andijon, Andijon [inaudible].

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

Mr. Bensmann?

Mr. BENSMANN. I doubt that it's possible to make with these people on the top reforms, because which kind of reform you would like to do? You would like to make a dialogue with the person to say, "You know, friend, next time you're not shooting on people? You didn't know it before?"

But I understand. I also do not know what's going on now. Maybe Uzbekistan turns now to an [inaudible] of Central Asia or maybe an internal struggle is going on, because I have hope still, because there are a lot of people, yes, who graduated either in Europe or in America. They had experience of the outside world.

And maybe, even if they are working for the government, they know that this was a crossing of a red line. And maybe something internal will change.

Mr. ADERHOLT. Thank you.

I'm going to turn over back to Mr. Pitts for the testimony of the other people here. So thank you very much.

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Congressman Aderholt.

We'll proceed now to the other witnesses. And I'll ask them to go in this order: Holly Cartner, who's the Executive Director of the Europe and Central Asia Division of Human Rights Watch, first; and then Robert Templer, who is the Asia Program Director of the International Crisis Group; and then, finally, Muhammad Salih, who's a well-known writer and poet, the leader of the Erk [Freedom] Party.

Holly Cartner?

**HOLLY CARTNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EUROPE &
CENTRAL ASIA DIVISION, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

Ms. CARTNER. Thank you very much to the Commission for inviting us to speak today on this extremely important and timely topic.

I want to focus also on the events of May 13th in Andijon. Human Rights Watch researchers were deployed to the region within days of the massacre and interviewed more than 50 witnesses to the violence in Kyrgyzstan and in Andijon. Much of what

I say, at least at the beginning, will, I think, be quite consistent with what you've heard already, but I think it's nevertheless important to know that when interviewed separately, many, many people have a very, very consistent story of what happened there.

As we've already heard, the May 13th killings, the massacre, began with thousands of people participating in what was a very rare protest in Bobur Square in the center of Andijon. And all indications are that they were expressing their anger about growing poverty and government repression.

The protests were sparked, as we've heard from the previous two witnesses, by the freeing from jail of the 23 businessmen, who had been charged and tried for religious fundamentalism. And I would just note that that particular charge is often made by the Uzbek authorities against anyone they consider to be a threat to their power.

The armed men who broke into the prison, took over government buildings, took hostages, and used people as human shields, committed serious crimes, and those are punishable under Uzbek criminal law. But nothing that was done by the armed men, nor certainly nothing that was done by the peaceful protestors in the square, could justify the government's response.

Based on our research, it's clear that the overwhelming majority of the people in Bobur Square at all times of the day were unarmed protesters. While some armed men were in the square, they remained usually on the fringes or on the margins of the crowd. This is confirmed both by eyewitness testimony and by photographs that we have reviewed.

Despite the overwhelming presence of unarmed civilians, of men, women, old, elderly, women, children, the Uzbek Government never made an announcement to the crowd to disperse, as we've heard from other speakers already. And they gave no warning of the impending attack. They did not make any attempt to use any form of crowd control or to take any other steps that might have minimized the risk and danger to the unarmed protesters.

Instead, armored personnel carriers and military trucks, as well as snipers from various buildings, fired indiscriminately into the crowd during the day and more directly at the crowd in the evening. In fact, our research showed that security forces never targeted the few gunmen who were around the margins of the square, but instead focused on the innocent and unarmed civilians who were protesting there.

No ambulances were allowed into the area after the shooting was over to collect the wounded. Instead, the wounded were simply left in the streets—many of them were left in the streets to die. And what is more, Human Rights Watch received testimony that soldiers summarily executed some of the wounded who were still lying in the streets the next day, on the morning of May 14.

The scale of the killings was so extensive and so unjustified that we can call this, as the other witnesses, a massacre. Eyewitnesses have told us that between 300 and 400 people were present at the worst shooting incident, which took place near the cinema. That was only one, though, of several shooting incidents that resulted in casualties during the day. So this is just an effort to try and get a very rough estimate of how many might have been killed.

The Uzbek Government has denied all responsibility for the killings. It claims that the death toll was 176 people and that the only ones who died were either law enforcement officials or civilians killed by the gunmen, as well as the gunmen themselves.

Not surprisingly, the Uzbek Government claims that the attackers were Islamic extremists. For nearly a decade now, the Uzbek Government has cast nearly all of its domestic critics as terrorists, extremists, and Islamic fundamentalists.

Human Rights Watch research found no evidence that the protesters or the gunmen had an Islamist agenda. Interviews with numerous people present at the demonstration consistently showed that the protesters spoke about economic conditions in Andijon, government repression, and unfair trials, not the creation of an Islamic state.

Uzbek authorities have done everything possible to hide the truth behind the massacre. In the hours after the violence, the government forces removed most of the bodies and washed away the evidence of the brutality without first doing any time of forensic investigation.

At the same time, the city was virtually closed down to strangers and there was a strict clampdown on media coverage. Journalists who happened to witness the killings in Andijon often had their materials confiscated and were threatened.

The Uzbek authorities have also tried to ensure that other witnesses to the May events keep silent. People in Andijon have reported to us that the police had explicitly warned them not to speak to journalists or other outsiders. Government agents have also gone from house to house trying to identify those who were missing and confiscating passports and identification documents to further intimidate the families of the protesters.

Since the May 13th events, authorities have also arrested at least 10 human rights defenders and opposition activists in Andijon. Others have been beaten by unknown assailants, threatened by local authorities, set upon by mobs, and placed under house arrest.

More than 6 weeks after the massacre, Andijon residents continue to live in extreme fear of government retribution for speaking out about the event. The city remains essentially closed to journalists and human rights investigators.

Despite the Uzbek Government's best efforts to hide the truth behind the killings of May 13th, authoritative accounts on what happened in Andijon do exist, including the excellent report released last week by the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The OSCE report is consistent with our own findings as to the sequence of events and the undeniable responsibility of Uzbek Government forces for the large number of killings of unarmed civilians. The OSCE report concluded that, quote, "Force was used repeatedly against unarmed civilians throughout the day, that it was indiscriminate and disproportionate, and that many unarmed civilians were wounded or killed," unquote.

Our respective investigations are only a first step toward setting the record straight, however. Many questions remain unanswered,

including the precise death toll and the government—the identity of government troops that were responsible for the killings.

For this reason, the main recommendation flowing from both Human Rights Watch's report and the OSCE report is that an independent international investigation into Andijon events is needed. Only a full-fledged international investigation, with access to official records, can give a true picture of what actually happened and provide the basis for the beginning of an accountability process.

However, the Uzbek Government has rejected an international investigation. Instead, earlier this month, it invited a number of governments with diplomatic presence in Tashkent, including the United States and France, to monitor a commission of inquiry underway by the Uzbek Parliament.

Both the United States and France rightfully declined, but others, including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan's Central Asian neighbors, are taking part. Needless to say, we do not view this as a credible effort.

Given the government's overall poor human rights record, and in particular its record of impunity for human rights violations, it is unlikely that any government-led investigation could possibly be credible. This makes an independent, international investigation, led by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, imperative for the establishment of a true record of the killings and the start of accountability.

I would also like to highlight one other troubling situation related to the events in Andijon. More than 500 Uzbek citizens who fled their homes after the events in Andijon have sought refuge in Kyrgyzstan. Many are currently sheltered in the camp near Sasyk, Kyrgyzstan, and there's growing concern that the Kyrgyz Government, which is itself under intense pressure from Uzbek authorities, may not be able or willing to provide these refugees with adequate protection.

Human Rights Watch has maintained staff in the refugee camp and in the region since the events in Andijon. And we have growing concern that the refugees risk refoulement.

Twenty-nine Uzbek citizens are currently in Kyrgyz custody and were transferred there from the refugee camp and are at an extremely high risk of being returned to Uzbekistan in the next days. Already on June 10th, the Kyrgyz authorities extradited four Uzbek asylum seekers back to Uzbekistan, although they clearly—their asylum applications had not yet been reviewed, and they clearly face a serious risk of torture. No international monitor, to my knowledge, has had access to the four since their return to Uzbekistan.

To date, the Uzbek authorities have requested the extradition of 133 individuals who sought refuge in Kyrgyzstan after the May 13th violence. It's especially important to stress that everyone in the group in Kyrgyzstan, whether ultimately recognized as a refugee or not, is at great risk of torture if returned to Uzbekistan.

It's therefore absolutely prohibited by the Convention Against Torture for them to be returned to Uzbekistan. And Kyrgyzstan is a signatory to that convention.

It should also be noted that Uzbek officials have been particularly eager to have these individuals return to Uzbekistan in part because, as I noted before, it's trying to prevent anyone with details about the massacre from being able to tell his or her story. Uzbek security officials are operating in the area around the refugee camp inside Kyrgyzstan and pose a real danger to those who have sought shelter there.

I agree with all of the recommendations that the previous two speakers have already made, and so I won't take much more time on this. Clearly, the international community must make sure that the continued refusal on the part of the Uzbek Government to cooperate with an independent international investigation carries real consequences and to set a timeline for compliance.

In a welcome note, the European Union has stated that it expects the Uzbek Government to reconsider its position on an international investigation by the end of June, and that continued lack of cooperation will trigger a partial suspension of its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Uzbekistan.

With the E.U. deadline drawing near, the United States needs to follow suit. As a first step, the administration should publicly announce that it is suspending discussions on a long-term military base and explore alternative basing arrangements until the Uzbek Government agrees to an international investigation.

Should the Uzbek Government persist in its refusal to accept an international investigation, the United States should bring to an end its post-September 11th strategic partnership with the country and discontinue its military presence.

The administration should also urgently determine whether any of the Uzbek military units involved in the Andijon killings received U.S. military or counterterrorism assistance, equipment, or training, in the interest of ensuring that U.S. policy is in full compliance with the Leahy Amendment.

And finally, the United States should do its share as a NATO member state to suspend all military activities with Uzbekistan in the framework of the Partnership for Peace program until the Uzbek Government has agreed to an international investigation into the Andijon events.

Thank you for your attention.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Thank you very much.

And now we'll go to Mr. Templer, his testimony. Robert Templer is the Asia Program Director of International Crisis Group. He heads a team of more than 20 researchers working in 8 offices covering 20 countries in Asia. Formerly a correspondent for Agence France Press and a visiting scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. He's the author of "Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam," and two forthcoming works on conflict.

And so, Mr. Templer, I look forward to your testimony. If you could hold within the timeframe of what we've got on the time clock so we can get onto to some questions, too.

And I'll apologize to the panel and to those present that I had to stay on the floor longer than I thought was necessary.

Mr. Templer?

**ROBERT TEMPLER, DIRECTOR, ASIA PROGRAM,
INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP**

Mr. TEMPLER. Thank you, Senator, for the invitation to speak before the Helsinki Commission.

And thank you to the other members.

I'm not going to repeat what we've heard from the eyewitnesses and from other researchers, though the counts very much coincide with our own research into the events in Andijon. Crisis Group has been working actually in Andijon for 6 months before the massacre, interviewing people in connection with the trial of the 23 businessmen.

We had reached the conclusion even before the massacre that they had no engagement in violent Islamic activity of any kind and that the trial was just another example of an unfair persecution of a religious group by the government of Islam Karimov.

It's quite clear throughout the Islamic world that groups that are intent on imposing an extreme vision of Islam on people, or establishing Islamic faith, or carrying out acts of violence in the name of Islam, are very rarely shy about their desire to do this. They more often than not go out there and tell people that this is exactly what they want to do and why they're doing it.

This has never been the case in this situation. And I think all evidence points to the fact that this was not driven by an Islamist agenda in any way.

Everybody heard in considerable detail about the events of May 13th and 14th. I'm going to focus on the wider picture of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, and how it might be done in terms of a policy response to the massacre, and also to the failure of the government of Karimov to really move Uzbekistan forward in any way.

I think there's now a widespread recognition that Karimov has set Uzbekistan on an extremely dangerous path of self-destruction and that he will not be persuaded by any other government that his policies are a disaster for his country and a disaster for the region.

Uzbekistan is now a member of that group of countries—and those include Zimbabwe, Burma, North Korea, Belarus, and a few others in this list—who are ruled by men who don't just show a lack of concern for people but are willing to inflict any level of suffering and hardship, as long as they remain in power.

The United States has taken strong stands against the leaders of those other countries. It is time to take the same stand against Karimov.

Karimov's past behavior provides us with no hope that he will change his policies. His background is as a Soviet state planner, and he still views the world through the lens of a Brezhnev-era apparatchik. He wants to see what he calls "civilized trade," by which he means that all businesses are controlled by his officials.

His edicts have crushed all economic opportunity in Uzbekistan, leaving people despairing and unable to earn the sparsest of incomes. He is contemptuous of the ideas of parliamentary democracy, religious freedom, press freedom, or economic freedom. He runs one of the most repressive police states in the world.

He targets people of faith and employs his feared secret services to torture and abuse them. He has banned Muslim and Christian groups and sent thousands to some of the most terrible prison camps on Earth purely for the expression of their religious beliefs. As a result of these policies, he rules a country in which people are now nostalgic for the time of the Soviet Union.

There's a growing expectation that the end of Karimov's rule will be violent. A civil conflict in Uzbekistan could be a disaster for Central Asia. It's likely to send large numbers of refugees into neighboring countries, and these countries ill-equipped to cope.

There's a real risk that the very fragile states of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, which border Uzbekistan, could be seriously undermined by any conflict that would break out within Uzbekistan.

U.S. policymakers should still aim to get Karimov onto the right path, but they should recognize that this is unlikely to happen now and start planning to minimize the dangers he presents to the wider security of Central Asia. There are very few good options for the short term in Uzbekistan. There is simply no set of policies that can make Karimov open up his country and deal with the real grievances of his people.

I think there are some steps that are important to take because they would at least signal to the Uzbek people that the United States is on their side, not the side of their despot. Among the steps we would like to see is a consistent demand from all parts of the U.S. Government calling for an independent international investigation into events in Andijon. This demand should be made in all fora, within the United Nations, within the OSCE, within NATO, as well as in all bilateral contacts, including those from the military and Department of Defense.

Suspension of negotiations on the lease of the airbase until Uzbekistan agrees to this investigation. Given the lack of cooperation in recent months over the base, defense planners should give careful consideration to the usefulness of having such a grudging ally in the region when other countries might be more cooperative.

The use of the Moscow Mechanism of the OSCE would allow for the appointment of a special rapporteur to investigate events in Andijon. The calling of a high-level meeting of the United States, the European Union, Japan to discuss a joint political and aid strategy for Central Asia. A full review of all engagement in Uzbekistan by the international financial institutions, including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Development Bank.

We do not argue for the withdrawal of all aid from Uzbekistan, as this would not help many of the people in the country. Aid is currently so limited that making it conditional's unlikely to have much effect on Uzbek policy.

It is time, however, to consider some targeted sanctions if the Uzbeks do not agree to an investigation. Such sanctions could include visa and travel bans for officials known to have been involved in the massacre and investigations into corrupt wealth held by Uzbek officials overseas. The security units involved in the massacre should not receive U.S. training or equipment.

In recognition of the difficulties of implementing aid projects, particularly those that help civil society organizations and small groups, Congress might consider allowing USAID and the U.S. Embassy greater latitude to implement small grants in a manner that prevents them from being obstructed by the Uzbek Government.

In the longer term, a critical priority is to develop a strategy that both prepares Uzbekistan for change and tries to minimize the regional fallout of possible state failure there. All around the world, we have seen the collapse of one country—more often than not, a state driven into the ground by its own leader—inflicts other countries and leads to widespread regional conflict.

We need to make sure this does not happen in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has found it difficult to cope with 500 refugees. If the number were in the hundreds of thousands, it would simply push the neighboring states to the point of collapse themselves.

If Uzbekistan does collapse, it would imperil efforts to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan, and it would risk creating a haven for extremists in what is already a dangerous neighborhood. It would mean a worsening of drug trafficking and crime. It would be a direct threat to security around the world.

There are some steps that could be taken to ensure longer-term stability in the region. One is to work with the key neighboring states, particularly Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan, to start planning for a possible internal conflict in Uzbekistan.

Work to expand their capacity to handle natural and man-made disasters, including improving information and management systems and the pre-positioning of supplies to handle possible refugee flows. Expand educational contacts with Uzbekistan, including exchanges with all various groups in that society.

Exposure to education in the United States, Europe or at such institutions as the American University in Bishkek can only help create a cadre of pro-Western thinkers who oppose what Karimov is doing to the country. Expand the training of and support for local independent journalists, human rights activists, and lawyers, and the local NGOs that support them.

We recognize that Uzbek Government places enormous obstacles in the way of efforts such as this but believe that they should continue. Expand training in key areas that would be needed to run any transition to democracy in Uzbekistan, including civilian security, military experts, legal reform experts, parliamentary experts, and civil service reform experts. In short, we need to prepare all of the expertise that would be necessary for a post-Karimov transition.

Expand broadcasting to Uzbekistan in Uzbek and Russian to ensure that Uzbeks can get news and educational opportunities beyond what is offered by the state-controlled media and schools. Start planning regional transport links in a way that means Uzbekistan cannot block trade and regional development, which is currently the case. Uzbekistan obstructs most of trade from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan that would go through Uzbekistan to other countries.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are very vulnerable to disruptions in road and rail transport within Uzbekistan. To work through the

International Labour Organization and other partners to end the use of forced and child labor to pick cotton, which is a major source of economic grievance in the Fergana Valley.

Events in Andijon show that we cannot wait to come up with effective policies that stabilize Central Asia. All members of the OSCE need to come together to find ways to ensure that change comes peacefully and quickly to Uzbekistan and that its young people do not become another lost generation in this part of the world, without hope and potentially attracted to extremism.

We also need to work with other countries in the region to ensure that any possible violence in Uzbekistan does not become the spark that sets off a regional conflagration.

Thank you.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Thank you, Mr. Templer.

Our final witness is Muhammad Salih. He's a well-known writer and poet. Muhammad Salih is the leader of Erk, the Freedom Party. In December 1991, he was a contender in Uzbekistan's Presidential election, receiving, according to official tallies, 12 percent of the vote.

In 1993, after President Islam Karimov closed down all opposition activity, Mr. Salih fled the country, first to Turkey, then to Norway. He remains an opposition leader in exile and now resides in Germany. This is his first visit to the United States in 10 years.

Mr. Salih, welcome to the committee. I'm pleased to receive your testimony. And we look forward to the discussion.

Mr. Salih?

MUHAMMAD SALIH, CHAIRMAN, ERK PARTY

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. Ladies and gentlemen, Chairman, Senator Brownback, thank you very much for giving me an opportunity to come to this audience today to these hearings. Thank you very much.

The scale of atrocities that took place in Uzbekistan last month are becoming very clear to the world. And the testimonies of the previous three panelists, they only confirm this. I just want to emphasize the political aspects and overall political situation there. And therefore, in order to save our time, I want to give it to the interpreter to read the testimony.

The group which took over the Governor's office was prepared for compromises and requested the mediation of Russian President Putin in order to avoid a bloodshed. However, President Karimov denounced this proposal and ordered his forces to shoot the protesting residents of Andijon. The targeted were not extremists, but the crowd of Andijonis.

Karimov was not afraid of extremists with Kalashnikovs in their hands. He feared unarmed crowds of peaceful populations who were protesting in the square and talking about their problems. He ordered to kill them in order to spread fear among the population and not to let them even think about what happened in Ukraine, Georgia, or Kyrgyzstan.

An armed group gave him a good excuse to commit mass murder. Some say that the group who stormed government buildings using weapons were guided the government, and such versions should not be ignored, too.

The Andijon massacre could be compared to Tiananmen Square crisis, but the response from the world community to the events in Andijon is many times smaller. The attempts of western governments to prevent further repression against our people are regarded by our great neighbors, like Russia and China, as interference in domestic affairs of Uzbekistan, although they do not consider their open support of the Karimov regime, which is responsible for the Andijon massacre, as open interference in the internal affairs, again, in Uzbekistan.

This concludes that, when they regard sovereignty of the Uzbek state, they mean only the sovereignty and independence of its authoritarian leader. Such support inspires President Karimov to continue what he has been doing.

Embarrassed after Western criticism for what happened in Andijon, Karimov rushed to secure Chinese support for what he did. On the contrary, he offered China oil and gas projects in Uzbekistan worth \$600 million. The danger of such cooperation with China, with its expansionist policy toward Central Asia, must not be underestimated.

The regime of Karimov is coming to its end. That problem is to end it bloodlessly. Karimov may think otherwise, but he must understand that he would be brought accountable for any violence. The role of America in this peaceful end of the regime would be crucial.

But first of all, America and the rest of the world must understand that estimates that Islamic fundamentalists would come to power after Karimov are not true. There is no religious group in Uzbekistan that has the real support of mass populations. They are rather marginalized and disintegrated. And most importantly, they do not have a support platform among the population.

They are usually gathered around one mullah or religious scholar who has no political vision nor concrete program. There could be one Hizb-ut-Tahrir, but even this group will never progress in Central Asia because its ideology is based on pan-Arabism, which is alien to our people.

Their effective activities could be explained by the social and economic crisis in Uzbekistan, or simply by poverty of the population, where well-funded men, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, can hire large numbers of unemployed youth to distribute its propaganda.

Another feature of this group is that they call "non-believers" those who do not join them. And such a radical approach has distanced our people from them. Therefore, such groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir will remain alien, even for the most vigorous opponents of Karimov.

The attempts of certain political analysts and experts to portray Islamic fundamentalism as the only alternative to the Karimov regime only bolsters the regime's assertion that, if Karimov is gone, the Islamists will take over. Such obligations only help Karimov to remain in power.

These quasi-estimates are simply baseless without any statistics and public opinion research, such as now are produced outside Uzbekistan, and geopolitical interests of certain great powers are taken into account while producing them.

We must understand that the sense of unaccountability has played a big role after the events in Andijon. Karimov is convinced that he will not be accountable for what happened there. And now it is the time to eliminate that sense.

Last year, the U.S. Congress has passed an act on democracy in Belarus against the regime of Lukashenka. It would be fair to pass such act on Uzbekistan, too. While meeting many people in organizations in the United States, numerous times I hear, “How could America help to progress democracy in Uzbekistan?”

We ask the following: the legalization of the Uzbek democratic opposition, the safe return of the democratic opposition leaders to Uzbekistan under the Western and U.N. security guarantees, ensure free and fair parliamentary and Presidential elections with participation of the opposition groups.

At first stage, this would be sufficient to change anti-democratic regime by democratic methods. All other attempts of replacing bad Karimov by good Karimov would only mean betrayal of our people and democracy. Presently, such scenarios are actually being pushed by certain groups inspired by the inner-circle—inspired by the support of Karimov’s inner-circle.

It’s important to have fundamental changes, bringing young leaders with new mentality, free of communism radiation. After the collapse of USSR, all newly formed states renamed their Red Squares to the Freedom or Independence Squares. But yet, they have not become free and independent, overshadowed by dictatorship and tyranny.

The Western world must support the democratic movements of Central Asia, Uzbekistan in particular. Democratic forces are the only key to the solution of conflicts, of problems of Central Asia.

You could see this phenomenon in the example of Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. There’s no other alternative. Events in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan have given [inaudible] hope to millions of my hopeless countrymen. Please support our democracy.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Thank you very much. And I’m pleased that you’re hear to testify. And I have some questions.

Mr. Salih, first, I would want to—I want to start off with a question, that there’s been a number of accusations about you from Uzbek authorities.

They say you’re responsible for explosions in Tashkent in 1999, that you’ve had ties with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. It’s a terrorist organization. You’ve also been accused of contacts with a Chechen terrorist. And even charges last week that your son trained at a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan.

Because those accusations are out and swirling around, I would like for you to, if you would, to please address those questions directly.

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for asking this question, because it’s really, indeed, a very important question, because I can feel the hand of Karimov behind this.

And actually, I wanted to read out my statement that I prepared. And it would answer, actually, all of these questions, if you allow.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Yes, please.

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. After being exiled from Uzbekistan in early '90s, I sought many avenues to bring democratic reforms to Uzbekistan. From 1994 to 1996, I met with many groups offering assistance in liberating Uzbekistan. I do not deny meeting with some of these people. However, I do deny supporting them.

The Karimov regime, in order to discredit me as its opponent, for many years blamed me for the contacts with Islamic radicals. The only witness who has testified against me during the trial of 1999 bombing in Tashkent, is Zaynettin Askarov, a member of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. On 26 November, 2003, during an interview to Radio Liberty and BBC from the Tashkent prison, he publicly denied his previous testimony, which he gave during 1999 trials.

During his interview with Radio Liberty and BBC, Zaynettin Askarov said that Muhammad Salih has never had any connection with their group or any other religious groups and that his previous statement accusing Salih in connection with IMU and other groups were given under extreme pressure at the direct order of Zakir Almatov, Uzbekistan Interior Minister. He publicly apologized for the lie that he had to tell during the 1999 Tashkent trial.

Furthermore, in 1999, after the bombings in Tashkent, President Karimov stated during the press conference that Muhammad Salih's son, Timur at that time was in one of Afghanistan's terrorist training camps. Ironically, at that time, my son Timur and I were in Istanbul and gave an interview to BBC Radio Uzbek service. The interview is available in BBC radio archives.

I state with full responsibility that my son, Timur Salih has never been in Afghanistan. As for the so-called evidence, it is photographs of my links to terrorists that have been circulating. The picture of me and IMU leader, Tahir Yuldosh, was made in 1996. At that time, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan did not exist as a terrorist organization.

Furthermore, Tahir Yuldosh, now a well-known terrorist, met with many other politicians in his capacity as the member of the United Tajik Opposition, which later joined the Tajik-coalition government. Once I realized his radical stance on the issues, I quickly distanced myself from him.

I have no link with and never supported the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan ideology, which is based on violence. And as I have always been a dedicated democrat, I condemn violence in any form.

The photograph of then-President of Chechnya Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, my former classmate at the Moscow Institute of Literature, was made during Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev's official visit to Turkey in 1996, after he was received by the Kremlin in Moscow where he signed a peace accord with President Yeltsin.

I do not—and never will—support the use of terrorism by any group. The 1998 bombing on the U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, the bombing of the USS Cole in 2000, the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001, all these acts are deplorable. The use of terrorism is a disdainful practice and does not bring about true reform.

I urge the world community not to believe in the lies and old Soviet-style disinformation of the Karimov regime. Thank you.

Mr. BROWNBACk. Mr. Salih, some analysts have been going back and forth on the U.S. connection and role in Uzbekistan. I believe Ms. Cartner was saying we should pull out of Uzbekistan, if I'm paraphrasing her correctly, if no progress is being made. We should not negotiate a long-term base agreement.

Others are saying we should not abandon Uzbekistan because that will have a negative impact on the growth of—the future growth of democracy in this regime and economic liberalization in a post-Karimov era. What are your thoughts on the U.S. connection to Uzbekistan in the future?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. The U.S. military presence, the presence of the U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan, actually have made a positive psychological effect in Uzbekistan, because of our situation, where our country is squeezed between two other great powers with their expansionist policies, China and Russia, it provided us some sort of security guarantees.

But on the other hand, we did not want America to become a hostage of its own base there, when the questions of human rights and democracy advancement are sidelined. The ideal option, of course, would be to have both, to have U.S. military presence there, and also, at the same time, to continue to use pressure on the Government of Uzbekistan, if there was an opportunity for that.

But it is highly unlikely that both could come together. And we hope that America chooses freedom. And thinking long term, the long-term interests of the United States, as well as the interests of the people of Uzbekistan are establishing a democracy there, and even if it comes at the expense of abandoning a military base there.

Mr. BROWNBACk. Let me understand then correctly, because I thought you were saying at the outset that the presence of U.S. military has had a positive impact on the region, but are you saying now that, if democracy is not engaged in Uzbekistan, the United States should pull its military presence out?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. As an Uzbek, as a person who knows this regime, this unchangeable regime, very well, and also knowing that the regime understands only pressure, I do believe that, if there was an opportunity to have both, to preserve the military base and at the same time to continue to put pressure on the government, on the regime, I would support this.

Because we also have concerns about growing Chinese interest. And they could be interested in establishing a military presence in Uzbekistan. And that could put in danger not only Uzbekistan but the entire Central Asian region.

Mr. BROWNBACk. Some analysts see Andijon as Islam Karimov's Tiananmen Square—you cited that analogy—a violent gesture to intimidate any existing or potential opposition. Do you think President Karimov deliberately ordered his troops to shoot to send a message?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. I'm convinced that President Karimov deliberately ordered to kill people in order to give a message, in order to prevent people of Uzbekistan to go protesting to the streets, just like it happened in Kyrgyzstan, in Ukraine, in order to keep people under fear.

Mr. BROWNBACk. Congressman Pitts?

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll continue with Mr. Salih.

You said pressure is important, it's good. What kind of pressure specifically might induce Islam Karimov to make meaningful changes in Uzbekistan?

Mr. SALIH [through interpreter]. First of all, the pressure could include economic pressure, including financial, and also political pressure. And at the same time the United States could use the neighboring countries, surrounding Uzbekistan to put those kind of pressure, as well.

And also, at the same time, I wouldn't want to see Uzbekistan as completely isolated from the Western World. So in this way, the pressure could be calculated in a very balanced way that there could be some, at least, some minimum opportunity left for President Karimov under which he could either agree to reform or under that pressure he could peacefully resign or agree to resign, to give up power.

Mr. PITTS. Let me ask the other panelists to comment. I'll rephrase the question.

Is there any form of pressure that might induce Islam Karimov to make meaningful changes in Uzbekistan? And is there any reason to believe that systemic reforms are possible in Uzbekistan while Karimov is in power?

Ms. Cartner first?

Ms. CARTNER. Taking your last question first, I have very serious doubts that any kind of systemic reform can be carried out with the current administration, the current Government in Uzbekistan.

Karimov and others in the government have shown no willingness to take up recommendations and the engagement of the international community on human rights issues, even in terms of working out a long-term action plan, for example, on torture. And it's something that was very concrete and would theoretically be something that could be taken on step-by-step.

There's no willingness of the government to do so. I don't see any indication there of any willingness to reform. On the contrary, we see efforts to make quite superficial changes only when there's real pressure coming, which are then superficial at best. So I don't have great hope that we'll see significant changes at this point.

I honestly don't know the answer to your first question. I think that our colleague from the ICG has put it very well, that it's hard to see what pressure there is that will change this particular government at this point.

However, I would argue that that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be trying. And that doesn't mean that the U.S. Government shouldn't be trying. Everyone in their own capacity has to look for the things that the government might care about and to push in that way.

That's why we've made the recommendation on the base. We've looked at economic issues—what does Karimov care about? Money, perhaps. A military engagement, and the close ties that he has with the U.S. Government. And therefore, those things have to be linked to progress on human rights issues.

As I think some of your colleagues in the Congress have said, after a government massacres its citizens, the relationship with the

United States cannot remain the same. And I would say that, even if it doesn't make a difference in the very short term for changing the Karimov government, changing its conduct, that it's a very important signal that you send to the people of Uzbekistan who are ultimately the ones who have to hear the message that the U.S. Government, that the E.U., and that others in the international community support them and stand with them.

It may be a long-term strategy. But they need to know that the U.S. Government stands on the side of the people of Uzbekistan and the protection of their rights.

And ultimately, I would also argue that it's a question for the U.S. Government itself. Is the relationship with Uzbekistan at this point bringing such benefits that it's worth compromising some of the most fundamental values that you have articulated that the government, that the administration has articulated, as priorities in the region, including fighting terrorism and also creating stability?

And I would say that the policies being pursued at this point are actually counterproductive for both of those goals.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Templer?

Mr. TEMPLER. Since 2001, the U.S. Government has made very generous offers to the Uzbek Government to support a process of reform, and has encouraged that process in a whole range of ways. And yet, the Uzbek Government has taken a whole array of steps backward, particularly in the economics sphere.

So it does seem that no array of incentives or pressures is willing to—is capable of moving Karimov, particularly in terms of opening up the economy and lifting some of the extreme restrictions on individual economic activity that still exist.

I do think that the United States needs to continue to apply both an offer of incentive, a plan of action for reform, and also to intensify some of the pressure that it can apply through the base issue, through a number of critical commodities that are the mainstay of Karimov's rule, and certainly most of that money goes mostly to the elite. Cotton and gold, for example, mostly provide wealth to a very small group of people in Tashkent.

It's extremely difficult to control the trade in those commodities in any way. But I do think it would be possible to develop a series of increasing steps that would apply increasing pressure to Karimov and would certainly make him understand that his current behavior's been unacceptable.

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Bensmann or Galima, would you like to comment on that question?

Mr. BENSMANN. I strongly believe that Uzbekistan, even Karimov, I would say, has a desire to be accepted by the rest of the world. And even as I attend during the election day, when he was reelected in this [inaudible] election, I think it was Senator Lugar, that he went to Uzbekistan and he was so impressed by what he was seeing. That means Karimov wants to be loved by the West.

And I think what is very important, and does not cost too much, to make a clear statement by all [inaudible] of what is possible—also, in Germany and in Europe, to make clear statement that that

is, first of all, a massacre and that we condemn it. And that must be clear.

And if that is reported also to those people in Uzbekistan by various radio stations, that is a strong support. And I also have in mind [inaudible] of high-ranking Uzbek bureaucrats and employees of the government, who know that they don't want to go to China. They want to go to the West.

I think you have to support this kind of movement.

Ms. BUKHARBAEVA. What happened in Andijon is really a great tragedy not just for Uzbekistan, sure, but for whole Central Asia, and maybe for all people in the world, because it was absolutely murder during daylight, when these APCs were—and a line of APCs were driving along the square—and soldiers were sitting on APCs, shooting everybody who went in the square.

And everybody was thinking what they have to do, like a pressure [inaudible] happens. I don't think that they have to even know at the moment what will happen to the government after you press or not press. We have to just condemn it.

What happened in Andijon, it's something that shouldn't happen ever. And we're just people, not politicians or something like that. We have to say it's something wrong, because it's not just like an attack against Andijon people there. It was just real attack against humanity, against all our morals, against humanity in all the world.

So it's clear that it should be condemned. And afterwards, you have to think yourself, do you want to continue like to have any business dealings with this government or not?

Mr. PITTS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. BROWNBACK. I want to thank the panelists for being here, and Mr. Salih in particular, after 10 years of not being here. I understand you're also going to be meeting with a number of other U.S. Government officials and Members of Congress. And I'm delighted that your information will be getting out.

It's a very serious situation in Uzbekistan. And now what are the next steps to take? I think this panel's been very helpful on advising just what it is that we should be doing in the aftermath of the massacre in Andijon and what should be our response to the government in Uzbekistan.

The United States seeks to build positive relationships with every country in the world, and particularly, I might add, with those countries in Central Asia that have come out from underneath the Soviet Union, that are starting or reestablishing themselves. And now it's been 15 years. It does take time. But we want to build positive relationships in the region.

I think that's been everybody's desire for some period of time with President Karimov. And yet repeatedly he has denied very request for economic or political liberalization whatsoever, and then this most recent killing of his own people has taken place.

We will be, as the U.S. Government, seriously contemplating what additional steps that we can use and do to move forward with the people of Uzbekistan and pressing forward democratic and economic reforms in that nation, a very important nation in the region.

Thank you all for attending. The hearing's adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDICES

PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, CO-CHAIRMAN, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing. The issues raised by the crisis in Uzbekistan go to the very heart of the Helsinki process and some of the toughest problems U.S. policymakers have to address.

Having closely followed events in Uzbekistan for years, I think the most populous country in Central Asia may be at a tipping point. It is my impression that U.S. policy toward that country has reached a similar stage.

The political order that emerged in the former Soviet Union after its collapse is itself unraveling. As Georgian President Saakashvili and Ukrainian President Yushchenko have written, a third wave of liberty has begun in Europe. Central Asian leaders, especially Kyrgyz President Akaev, reacted to the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine by claiming “it can’t happen here.” President Karimov took the same position. But when neighboring Kyrgyzstan experienced its own revolution in March, he must have felt a cold wind blowing. President Karimov made clear his determination that no such events would take place on his watch, in his country. So, when protesters began gathering in Andijon in mid-May, I think Karimov decided to send them a message: “If you think this is Georgia, Ukraine or Kyrgyzstan, I’ll show you different.”

And he did. Though the Uzbek Government continues to insist that “only” 173 people died, the U.S. Government and most authoritative human rights NGOs believe many hundreds died. I welcome the report prepared by the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights which helps shed some light on the events in Andijon. By its own admission, that report is not a comprehensive, independent investigation that many of us have sought. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses, including those who were in the crowd in Andijon and, by a miracle, survived to tell what went on that bloody day.

What should we conclude from the Andijon tragedy? What happened in that city demonstrates the interlinked consequences of Uzbekistan’s lack of political and economic reform. The bloody confrontation had its origins in a trial of 23 devout businessmen whose enterprises employed thousands. Their economic success drew the attention of officials, who, failing to control the businesses, arrested their owners and charged them with Islamic radicalism. The rest, as they say, is history. In other words, if Islam Karimov allowed people to make a living in Uzbekistan, instead of maintaining Soviet-style economic practices and a bloated bureaucracy, many more people might be alive today in Andijon.

Similarly, the country’s unreformed judicial system, which remains fully controlled by the executive branch, leaves people unable to defend their rights and imprisons individuals by the thousands. They cannot rely on an objective examination of evidence or hope for an impartial verdict. The supporters of the 23 Andijon businessmen—including those who freed the jailed, attacked a mili-

tary barracks and occupied government buildings—took to the streets after the trial of the businessmen neared an end, in proceedings many in the local population deemed unfair and unjust.

There is no excuse for the armed attack on a military barracks, the taking of hostages, or the occupation of the local government administration buildings. But we cannot close our eyes to the growing frustration of Uzbekistan's long-suffering people either.

Considering the lack of progress on core human dimension issues in Uzbekistan and elsewhere throughout the region, the United States must use every means at its disposal to move the countries of Central Asia to greater respect for these fundamental rights. Therefore, I am introducing this week the Central Asia Democracy and Human Rights Act, which will condition all non-humanitarian U.S. assistance to the individual governments of Central Asia, both economic and military, on whether each is making "substantial, sustained and demonstrable progress" towards democratization and full respect of human rights. The Act will ensure U.S. engagement supports American values, promotes long-term stability and security in the region, and ensures that all assistance programs support and reinforce these goals.

What conclusions can we draw from Islam Karimov's response to Andijon? President Karimov has shown that he will not permit a peaceful revolution or even any change in Uzbekistan. He is prepared to use lethal force to disperse protesters and retain power. If more disturbances take place, he will likely do the same. How long Uzbek security forces carry out his orders to fire, however, remains an open question.

At home, Karimov has hunkered down, arresting opposition activists, independent journalists and intimidating witnesses to the Andijon events. When a delegation of U.S. Senators traveled to Uzbekistan to make inquiries, neither Karimov nor any Uzbek officials met with them. At the same time, he is lashing out at his accusers. Karimov has accused "foreign powers" of trying to control Uzbekistan. Uzbek media broadcasts barely concealed their attacks on the U.S. for allegedly seeking to undermine Uzbek independence. Karimov has turned to China and Russia, which have praised his handling of the Andijon crisis. Worsening U.S.-Uzbekistan relations have left the future of our base at K-2 uncertain. Tashkent has imposed new restrictions on U.S. military flights, including cargo flights, limiting them to daytime missions.

Perhaps the U.S. has already broken with Islam Karimov, and we just don't know it yet. In any case, it is hard to see where we go from here. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses as the United States, the OSCE, and the international community attempt to come to terms with the carnage at Andijon, fleeing refugees, and overall policy toward the Karimov regime.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF HON. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
RANKING MEMBER, COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND
COOPERATION IN EUROPE**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the ongoing crisis in Uzbekistan.

Whether you believe President Islam Karimov or almost everyone else about how many people died in Andijon last month, it was a turning point in the growing confrontation between state and society in Uzbekistan. President Karimov has blamed local Islamic radicals and outside agitators for instigating the disturbances, in the hope of fostering destabilization and creating an Islamic state. The charge is familiar—we have been hearing such claims from President Karimov for years now, whenever people try to protest or engage in opposition political activity.

Let us acknowledge that Uzbekistan really does face threats from Islamic radicals. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which the U.S. Government has designated a terrorist organization, has well-documented ties to al-Qaeda and has carried out terrorist actions in Uzbekistan. Moreover, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, whether you support or decry the government's ban, is gaining influence in the country. The group, which arose in the Middle East, pursues an anti-American, anti-Semitic agenda. Even if its claims to be non-violent are true, its values and goals—which feature the reestablishment of the Caliphate—stand at cross purposes with those of a secular, tolerant society.

The United States should be cooperating with Uzbekistan against international terrorism and we need not be ashamed of doing so. Nevertheless, many observers are convinced that President Karimov's policies are aiding and abetting terrorism, not fighting it. He views his own people with the most profound distrust, stubbornly insisting on total control of the political arena. Stifling all dissent, Islam Karimov appears to reject the notion that political opposition or any manifestation of discontent might not be subversive or could have motivations other than religious extremism.

Yet in Andijon, according to eyewitnesses—some of whom are present in the room today—there was no sign of Islamic fervor. Demonstrators were protesting economic deprivation, injustice and the lack of hope. They were calling for freedom, not shouting "Allahu Akbar." I suspect that what happened in Andijon has bolstered the radical Islamic cause, providing recruits and engendering an implacable desire for revenge.

Finally, I note that Uzbekistan has been identified as a country "in danger" on the Failed States Index just compiled by Foreign Policy Magazine and the Fund for Peace. That designation is all the more reason for us to make every effort to prevent disaster in that very important country.

**PREPARED STATEMENT OF ROBERT TEMPLER, DIRECTOR,
ASIA PROGRAM, INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP**

I would like to thank Senator Brownback, the chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the other distinguished members of the commission for giving me this opportunity today to testify on behalf of the International Crisis Group.

Crisis Group has been working in Uzbekistan since 2000 and we have produced more than a dozen reports on the country. Our staff in Central Asia have interviewed hundreds of people in the country and carried out extensive research on key issues in the region.

Most recently Crisis Group published a report setting out some of the background to the Andijon massacre and examining the social, economic and religious issues involved. Our colleagues at Human Rights Watch have also produced a detailed report on the events of May 13 and 14 that is also based on extensive interviews with witnesses. IWPR has also provided excellent reporting from Andijon. There has not been a full investigation by any intergovernmental organization into the events. Based on our research and that of other organisations, we have concluded:

- The response by the Uzbek security forces was wholly disproportionate to any crimes that had been committed and excessive force was used against people who were not involved in criminal activity

- Among the victims of the action of the security forces were townspeople, including women and children, who were bystanders; We don't know how many died—it could be as many as 750 people, according to some reports. We think it is at least 300–500.

- The 23 men on trial for being members of the so-called Akromiya group were not religious extremists and had no record of violence.

- Economic grievances and political repression motivated many of those who demonstrated in Andijon rather than any Islamist agenda.

- No credible evidence has been produced to show any involvement of people from outside Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek government has responded to international concern about the massacre with what can only be characterised as contempt:

- President Islam Karimov has rejected calls for an international investigation.

- Diplomats were only allowed to visit Andijon on a closely supervised tour that many of them described as unsatisfactory.

- President Islam Karimov and other Uzbek officials refused to meet with Senators John McCain, Lindsay Graham and John Sununu.

- The Uzbek government has restricted substantially U.S. access to Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, limiting flights by particular planes, limiting hours when flights can arrive and making it more difficult for the U.S. to use the facilities.

- The Uzbek government has applied intense pressure on the Kyrgyz government to return refugees. The repatriation of these people under the current circumstances would be a violation of international law concerning refugees and torture.

- Uzbek authorities have threatened witnesses and created a climate of intense fear in Andijon. This has included the intimidation and harassment of the family members of refugees.
- The government has withdrawn the already meagre cooperation with outside aid groups and governments, for example withdrawing visas for Peace Corps volunteers.
- The events in Andijon have been followed by a country-wide campaign of intimidation, harassment, and in some cases detention of local human rights activists and independent journalists.
- Foreign journalists have likewise been prevented from reporting on the events and their aftermath. For example, BBC Central Asia correspondent Monica Whitlock has been expelled from the country for “biased reporting” and “aiding terrorists.”

These are just the latest steps by an uncooperative government that rejects the values of democracy, human rights and economic freedom. For nearly 15 years U.S. and European governments have been trying to encourage reforms and greater openness in Uzbekistan. Since 2001, the United States stepped up those efforts, offering considerable assistance and signing an agreement under which Uzbekistan agreed to press ahead with reforms. The bilateral agreement involved clear commitments for steady progress toward both economic and political reforms on the one hand and military cooperation in facilitating U.S. military supply lines to Afghanistan as part of the war against terrorism on the other.

The U.S. also argued that the reform part of that agreement also advanced the war against terrorism by enabling the Uzbekistan government to demonstrate to its own citizens a better future, the best argument against radical recruitment. The United States extended a generous hand to support those reforms in Uzbekistan. However Islam Karimov has chosen to rebuff that friendship and become more repressive and more resistant to any outside engagement.

Moreover, the Karimov regime has consistently drawn the wrong conclusions from the popular revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, brought about by the population’s frustration with corrupt, often repressive regimes dominated by representatives of the Soviet-era nomenklatura. The Karimov regime has interpreted the fall of its counterparts elsewhere in the former Soviet Union as a sign of “weakness” on their part, and has only increased his oppression of his own people, a policy that will probably only hasten his own regime’s demise.

There is now a widespread recognition that Karimov has set Uzbekistan on a dangerous path of self-destruction and will not be persuaded by any government that his policies are a disaster. Uzbekistan is now a member of that group of countries—Zimbabwe, Burma, North Korea, Belarus and others—who are ruled by men who don’t just show a lack of concern for their people but are willing to inflict any level of suffering and hardship on them as long as they remain in power. The United States has taken strong stands against the leaders of those other countries. It is time to take the same stand against Karimov.

Karimov’s past behaviour provides us with no hope that he will change his policies. His background is as a Soviet state planner and he still views the world through the lens of a Brezhnev-era

apparatchik. He wants to see what he calls “civilised trade” by which he means all businesses are controlled by his officials. His edicts have crushed all economic opportunity, leaving people despairing and unable to earn the sparsest of incomes. He is contemptuous of the ideas of parliamentary democracy, religious freedom, press freedom or economic freedom. He runs one of the most repressive police states in the world. He targets people of faith and employs his feared secret services to torture and abuse them. He has banned Moslem and Christian groups and sent thousands to some of the most terrible prison camps on earth purely for their religious beliefs. As a result of these policies, he rules a country in which people are nostalgic for the Soviet Union.

There is a growing expectation that the end of Karimov’s rule will be violent. A civil conflict in Uzbekistan could be a disaster for Central Asia, sending refugees into neighbouring countries that are ill-equipped to cope, undermining fragile states in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan, reversing economic gains in Kazakhstan and potentially providing an area of unrest in which Islamic extremists and criminals would only prosper. U.S. policymakers should still aim to get Karimov onto the right path but they should recognise the fact that this is unlikely to happen and start planning to minimise the dangers he presents to the security of Central Asia.

There are very few good options for the short term in Uzbekistan. There is no set of policies that can make Karimov immediately open up his country and deal with the real grievances of his people. There are some steps that are important to take because they would at least signal to the Uzbek people that America is on their side, not the side of their despot.

Among the steps we would like to see:

- A consistent demand from all parts of the U.S. government calling for an independent international investigation into events in Andijon. This demand should be made in all fora—the UN, the OSCE and through NATO—as well as in all bilateral contacts, including those from the military and Department of Defense.

- Suspension of negotiations on the lease of Karshi-Khanabad base until Uzbekistan agrees to an independent investigation. Given the lack of cooperation in recent months over the base, defence planners should give careful consideration to the usefulness of having such a grudging ally in the region when other countries might be more cooperative.

- The use of the “Moscow Mechanism” of the OSCE that would allow for the appointment of a special rapporteur to investigate events in Andijon.

- The calling of a high-level meeting of the United States, the European Union and Japan to discuss a joint political and aid strategy for Central Asia.

- A review of all engagement in Uzbekistan by the international financial institutions including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Asian Development Bank.

We do not argue for the withdrawal of all aid from Uzbekistan, which will not help the people there. Aid is currently so limited that making it conditional is unlikely to have much effect on Uzbek policies. It is time however to consider some targeted sanctions if

the Uzbeks do not agree to an investigation. Such sanctions could include visa and travel bans for those officials known to have been involved in the massacre and investigations into corrupt wealth held by Uzbek officials overseas. Those security units involved should not receive US training or equipment.

In recognition of the difficulties of implementing aid projects, particularly those that help civil society organisations and small groups, Congress might consider allowing USAID and the U.S. Embassy greater freedom to implement small grants in a manner that prevents them from being obstructed by the Uzbek government.

In the longer-term, a critical priority is to develop a strategy that both prepares Uzbekistan for change and tries to minimise the regional fallout of possible state failure there. All around the world we have seen the collapse of a country—more often than not a state driven into the ground by a despotic ruler—infect neighbouring countries and leading to widespread regional conflict that becomes extremely difficult to contain. We need to make sure this does not happen in Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan has found it difficult to cope with 500 refugees. Imagine if the number were in the hundreds of thousands. If Uzbekistan does collapse, it would imperil efforts to bring stability and democracy to Afghanistan and it would risk creating a haven for extremists in what is already a dangerous neighbourhood. It would mean a worsening of drug trafficking and crime. It would be a direct threat to security around the world.

There are some steps that could be taken to ensure longer-term stability in the region:

- Work with the key neighbouring states—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan—to start planning for possible conflict in Uzbekistan. Work to expand their capacity to handle natural and man-made disasters, including improving information and management systems and the pre-positioning of supplies to handle possible refugee flows.

- Expand educational contacts with Uzbekistan, including exchanges with all groups. Exposure to education in the United States, Europe or at such institutions as the American University in Bishkek can only help create a cadre of pro-Western thinkers who oppose what Karimov is doing to his country.

- Expand training of and support for local independent journalists, human rights activists, and lawyers, and the local NGOs that support them. We recognise the enormous obstacles the Uzbek government has put in the way of such efforts but believe they should continue.

- Expand training in key areas that would be needed to run any transition to democracy including civilian security and military experts, legal reform experts, parliamentary experts, civil service reform experts—in short, all of the expertise that will be needed to overcome the legacies of Karimov's rule.

- Expand broadcasting to Uzbekistan in Uzbek and Russian to ensure that Uzbeks can get news and educational opportunities beyond what is offered by the state controlled media and schools.

- Start planning regional transport links in a way that means Uzbekistan cannot block trade and development. This would also help in the event of any disturbance in Uzbekistan. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are vulnerable to disruptions in road

and rail transport in Uzbekistan. Both already suffer from Uzbek restrictions on trade.

- Work through the International Labour Organisation and corporate partners to end the use of forced and child labour to pick cotton—this is a major source of grievances and economic distress in the Fergana valley.

Events in Andijon show that we cannot wait to come up with effective policies to stabilise Central Asia. All members of the OSCE need to come together to find ways to ensure that change comes peacefully and quickly to Uzbekistan and that its young people do not become a lost generation, without hope and drawn to extremism. We also need to work with other countries in the region to ensure that any possible violence in Uzbekistan does not become the spark that sets off a regional conflagration.



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