



CRS Report for Congress

Uzbekistan: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests

Jim Nichol

Specialist in Russian and Eurasian Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

Uzbekistan is a potential Central Asian regional power by virtue of its relatively large population, energy and other resources, and location in the heart of the region. It has failed to make progress in economic and political reforms, and many observers criticize its human rights record. This report discusses U.S. policy and assistance. Basic facts and biographical information are provided. This report may be updated. Related products include CRS Report RL33458, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*.

U.S. Policy

According to the Administration, “it is in the U.S. and Uzbekistan’s interest to promote democracy, respect for human rights, territorial integrity, and the transition to a market-based economy in order to bolster greater social and political stability.” However, the Uzbek government’s continued “repression of civil society, religious groups, and political opposition [decreases] options for U.S. assistance.”¹

Cumulative U.S. assistance budgeted for Uzbekistan in FY1992-FY2007 was \$845.5 million (FREEDOM Support Act and agency budgets). In FY2008, estimated budgeted assistance was \$10.19 million, and the Administration has requested \$7.94 million for FY2009 (FREEDOM Support Act and other Function 150 foreign aid, excluding Defense and Energy Department funds). The main priorities of U.S. assistance requested for FY2009 are planned to be democratization, healthcare, and agricultural reforms. Plans for FY2009 include support for local groups, lawyers, and



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS. (4/07)

¹U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). *Congressional Notification: Uzbekistan*, No. 155, August 7, 2008.

activists on international human rights standards and how to protect human rights. Plans also include support for democratization programs “to improve the legal framework for non-governmental organization (NGO) and media operation, develop civil society organizational capacity, and strengthen public access to objective information.” However, USAID recently has pared its FY2009 request for democratization aid and boosted its request for healthcare, “which will improve public trust, goodwill, and stability, all of which directly contribute to U.S. foreign policy priorities for Uzbekistan.” USAID has called for more child survival assistance. It also warns that Uzbekistan “has one of the world’s highest recorded rates of multidrug resistant tuberculosis, and proposes that U.S. aid “will result in stronger political support for tuberculosis control, enhanced human and systems capacity, and mobilized communities.”² The FY2009 request for security assistance is one-half of estimated

funding for the previous year, because the Uzbek government “has continued to obstruct U.S. efforts.” In FY2008, the State Department has not been able to use budgeted security assistance, so has only requested \$710,000 for FY2009. A substantial share of security assistance requested for FY2009 is planned for combating human trafficking and to care for victims, and will be provided through the International Organization for Migration.³

In 2007, according to the State Department, the Uzbek government reacted to U.S. criticism of its democracy and human rights record by suspending the operations of two U.S.-funded NGOs, forcing the closure of a U.S.-based international human rights organization, and hampering the operations of U.S.-funded educational and other exchange programs. None of the more than 15 U.S.-funded organizations closed in 2006 were permitted to reopen. The United States continued to support the development of civil society by funding a cadre of professional nonprofit lawyers to render legal assistance to civil society groups, by sponsoring organizations that provide legal advice to the government on how to reform the legal and regulatory framework for NGO and media operations, and by awarding small grants to 30 NGOs and media outlets.⁴

Basic Facts

Area and Population: Land area is 174,486 sq. mi., slightly larger than California. The population is 28.3 million (*World Factbook*, mid-2008 est.). Administrative subdivisions include the Karakalpak Republic.

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

Gross Domestic Product: \$64.15 billion; per capita GDP is about \$2,300 (*World Factbook*, 2007 est., purchasing power parity).

Political Leaders: *President:* Islam Karimov; *Prime Minister:* Shavkat Mirziyoyev; *Speaker of the Legislative Chamber:* Dilorom Toshmammadova; *Speaker of the Senate:* Ilgizar Sobirov; *Foreign Minister:* Vladimir Norov; *Defense Minister:* Ruslan Mirzayev.

Biography: Karimov, born in 1938, in 1989 became First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party. In 1990, the Uzbek Supreme Soviet elected him to the newly created post of President, and he also became a member of the Soviet Communist Party Politburo. In December 1991, he was popularly elected President of Uzbekistan, winning 86% of the vote against opposition Erk Party candidate Mohammed Solikh. In 1995, Karimov orchestrated a popular referendum to extend his presidency until 2000, won re-election, and in 2002 orchestrated another to extend his term until December 2007.

² USAID. *Congressional Notification: Uzbekistan*, August 7, 2008.

³ U.S. Department of State. *Congressional Budget Justification for FY2009*.

⁴ U.S. Department of State. *Advancing Freedom and Democracy Reports*, May 23, 2008.

Since FY2003, Congress has prohibited FREEDOM Support Act assistance to the central government of Uzbekistan unless the Secretary of State determines and reports that Uzbekistan is making substantial progress in meeting commitments to respect human rights, establish a multiparty system, and ensure free and fair elections, freedom of expression, and the independence of the media (P.L.108-7; P.L.108-199; P.L. 108-447; P.L. 109-102). Congress received a determination of progress in FY2003. In FY2004 and thereafter, however, aid to Uzbekistan has been withheld because of lack of progress on democratic reforms. Among other assistance, International Military Education and Training (IMET) and Foreign Military Financing (FMF) programs are conditioned on respect for human rights so also have been curtailed. Some aid that is subject to restrictions has been reprogrammed or allocated using notwithstanding authority.

Contributions to the Campaign Against Terrorism

An agreement on the U.S. use of the Khanabad airbase, near the town of Karshi (termed the K2 base) for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan was signed in October 2001, and a joint statement pledged the two sides to consult in the event of a threat to Uzbekistan's security and territorial integrity. In March 2002, the two sides signed a "Strategic Partnership" accord that reiterated this nonspecific security guarantee and Uzbekistan pledged to "intensify democratic transformation." In addition to security assurances and increased military and other aid, U.S. forces in Afghanistan killed many terrorists belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU; dedicated to the forceful establishment of Islamic rule in Uzbekistan). Following U.S. criticism of Uzbek government actions in Andijon (see below), the government demanded at the end of July 2005 that the United States vacate K2 within six months. On November 21, 2005, the United States officially ceased operations at K2. The Uzbek government has permitted Germany to maintain a small base at Termez.

Foreign Policy and Defense

Home to more than half the population of Central Asia, Uzbekistan seeks to play a leading role in regional affairs. From the late 1990s until mid-2005, Karimov's priority was to seek closer security ties with the United States while maintaining working relations with Russia and China. However, after the mid-2005 events in Andijon (see below), he shifted to closer ties with the latter two states. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined the SCO and in 2003 insisted on hosting its Regional Anti-Terrorism Center. Uzbekistan has ongoing tensions with other Central Asian states over its mining of borders, water-sharing, border delineation, and other issues. In 1998, the Tajik president accused Uzbekistan of supporting an uprising in northern Tajikistan, and in July 2008, the head of the Tajik Supreme Court asserted that Uzbek security forces had bombed the Supreme Court building the previous summer as part of efforts to topple the government. In 2002, the Turkmen government accused Uzbek officials of conspiring to overthrow it. The Kyrgyz premier rejected claims by Karimov in 2005 that Kyrgyzstan had provided training facilities and other support for the Andijon militants.

The Uzbek military is the most advanced among those of the Central Asian states. The armed forces consist of about 50,000 ground force troops and 17,000 air force troops. There are also up to 19,000 internal security (police) troops and 1,000 national guard troops (*The Military Balance*, February 2008). Uzbekistan's military doctrine proclaims

that it makes no territorial claims on other states and adheres to nuclear non-proliferation. Military cooperation between Russia and Uzbekistan is ensured through a 1992 Friendship Treaty, a 1994 military treaty, a 1999 accord on combating terrorism and Islamic extremism, and a November 2005 Treaty of Alliance. The latter accord calls for mutual consultations in case of a security threat to either party. In December 2006, Uzbekistan rejoined the Collective Security Treaty Organization (it had withdrawn in 1999; members now include Russia, Belarus, Armenia, and the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan). Until 2005, Uzbekistan played an active role in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) by participating in military exercises and training. Perhaps a conciliatory sign, Karimov attended the NATO summit in April 2008 and offered to facilitate NATO rail shipments through Uzbekistan to Afghanistan.

On February 16, 1999, six bomb blasts in Tashkent's governmental area by various reports killed 16-28 and wounded 100-351. Karimov termed the bombing an assassination attempt. He alleged that exiled Erk Party leader Mohammad Solikh led the plot, assisted by Afghanistan's Taliban and IMU co-leader Tahir Yuldashev. Solikh denied any role in the bombings. In November 2000, Yuldashev and Namanganiy received death sentences and Solikh 15.5 years in prison. Another defendant, Najmiddin Jalolov (see below), received 18 years (all *in absentia*). Other security threats included the invasion of neighboring Kyrgyzstan in July-August 1999 by several hundred IMU and other guerrillas. They were rumored to be aiming to create an Islamic state in south Kyrgyzstan as a springboard for a jihad in Uzbekistan. By mid-October 1999, they had been forced out of Kyrgyzstan with Uzbek aid. The next August, dozens of IMU and other guerrillas again invaded Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but were expelled by late October. In September 2000, the State Department designated the IMU as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and stressed that the "United States supports the right of Uzbekistan to defend [itself against] the violent actions of the IMU."

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

On May 12, 2005, an armed group stormed a prison in Andijon where those on trial were held and released hundreds of inmates. There is a great deal of controversy about whether this group contained foreign-trained terrorists or was composed mainly of the friends and families of 23 businessmen who were on trial on charges of belonging to an Islamic terrorist group. Many freed inmates then joined others in storming government buildings the next day. Karimov flew to the city to direct operations and reportedly had restored order by late on May 13. According to testimony at the first major trial in late 2005 of alleged Andijon terrorists, the governments of the United States and Kyrgyzstan had helped finance and support the terrorists' attempt to establish an Islamic caliphate,

and international media, local human rights groups, and NGOs had conspired in this attempt. The U.S. and Kyrgyz governments and several media organizations denied such involvement. The United States and others have called for an international investigation, which Karimov has rejected.

Political and Economic Developments

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

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

A limited observer mission from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded that Legislative Chamber elections held on December 26, 2004, “fell significantly short of ... international standards for democratic elections.” The lack of open information about the race contributed to low public interest and in less than a 50% turnout in half the districts, triggering required run-offs on January 9, 2005. Two weeks later, local legislatures, overseen by members of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC), selected Senators. The president’s sixteen appointees to the Senate included deputy prime ministers, the chairman of the Supreme Court, and the foreign minister, making the Senate an amalgam of the three branches of government.

The Uzbek CEC in mid-November 2007 approved four candidates to run in the prospective December 23, 2007, presidential election. Although the Uzbek constitution bars a president from more than two terms, the Uzbek CEC argued that since the most recent constitution was approved in 1992, incumbent President Karimov’s “first term” should be considered as following his election in January 2000, so that he could run for a “second term” in December 2007. Karimov won re-election with 88% of 14.8 million votes with a 90.6% turnout. According to OSCE observers, the election “generally failed to meet many OSCE commitments for democratic elections.” There were no campaign

debates or open public meetings and media coverage was minimal. Each candidate used similar language to laud economic development and democratization under the incumbent president. The OSCE observers reported that the reported turnout appeared suspect.⁵ In his inaugural address on January 16, 2008, Karimov thanked the citizenry “who gave me a massive vote of confidence by freely expressing their will [in an] election which was held in full compliance with ... universally recognized democratic standards.”⁶

The State Department’s *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007* (released in March 2008) reported that Uzbek security forces routinely tortured, beat, and otherwise mistreated detainees to obtain confessions or testimony. Police arbitrarily detained citizens to extort bribes and frequently detained individuals for expressing views critical of the government. During 2007, several human rights activists, journalists, and Andijon residents were imprisoned for speaking about the 2005 events. In several cases, authorities subjected critics of the regime to forced psychiatric treatment. Police regularly detained citizens to prevent public demonstrations. Authorities sought to control all NGOs. The government restricted religious activity, treating virtually all non-approved religious observance as a crime. The government tightly controlled and censored the mass media, but some regional television stations reportedly were able to broadcast some critical stories on local issues. Journalists and human rights advocates who criticized the government were subject to harassment, arbitrary arrest, politically motivated prosecution, and physical attack. An amended media law required all Internet bloggers to register and provide authorities with copies of blogs. Human trafficking continued to be a significant problem. The government took some modest steps to combat it, although it did not fully comply with minimum standards for elimination of trafficking.

After economic dislocations associated with the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Uzbek economy ceased to decline and began to turn around in 1996. GDP increased an estimated 9.5% in 2007 and consumer price inflation was an estimated 38% (*The World Factbook*). In 2003, Uzbekistan announced that it would permit full currency convertibility, but vitiated the reform by reducing money in circulation, closing borders, and placing punitive tariffs on imports. These restrictions helped fuel organized crime, corruption, consumer shortages, and unemployment. Uzbekistan is the world’s fifth-largest cotton producer and second-largest exporter. About 30% of the country’s economic activity is based on agriculture, and the bulk of foreign currency earnings are based on cotton exports. The government closely controls this sector. A large portion of GDP growth reportedly is contributed by a tiny private sector. One quarter or more of the population remains below the poverty level, and a large portion of the working age population migrates abroad for work. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development announced in 2004 that it would limit lending in Uzbekistan, citing the government’s poor democratization and human rights record. Other international financial institutions have maintained some engagement. The International Monetary Fund in June 2008 praised Uzbekistan for high growth rates, large current account surpluses, a significant decline in the debt burden, and an increase in foreign exchange reserves.

⁵ OSCE. *Final Report on the Presidential Election in Uzbekistan*, April 23, 2008.

⁶ Open Source Center. *Central Eurasia: Daily Report*, January 16, 2008, Doc. No. CEP-950404.