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REASSESSING ANDIJAN: THE ROAD TO RESTORING U.S.-UZBEK RELATIONS

By AbduMannob Polat

FOREWORD

The events in Andijan's Babur Square in Uzbekistan on May 13, 2005 immediately excited fierce passions that have yet to be resolved. Human rights activists worldwide were quick to label the tragic occurrence an unprovoked brutal massacre by the security forces of President Islam Karimov, while Tashkent maintained that it had in fact crushed an uprising organized by radical Islamic terrorists. Every element of the incident is hotly disputed. Even the number of dead and injured is unclear—Tashkent maintains that less than 200 died; Western human rights groups place the death toll in the hundreds; and Hizb ut-Tahrir claims that up to 10,000 were killed. Many elements have contributed to making uncovering the truth about what happened difficult, not the least of which is the paucity of primary source material available in both Uzbek and Russian.

Into the breach has stepped AbduMannob Polat. Polat, an Uzbek, was the Director of the Central Asian Human Rights Information Network of the U.S. NGO Union of Councils, former chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan and former member of the Birlik political party. In December 1992, Polat was abducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan by Uzbek security forces because he was a co-sponsor and director of an international conference on human rights in Central Asia, organized by the Union of Councils. Back in Uzbekistan, Polat was sentenced to three years of imprisonment, but released because of strong international protest. He subsequently emigrated to the United States, where he currently resides.

Polat's background makes the thoroughness and objectivity of this paper all the more remarkable. Two years after the events on that tragic day in Uzbekistan, Polat's study is by far the most comprehensive and diligent investigation of the tragedy, and will quickly become the standard source of information about the event for the foreseeable future.

The paper places the events in Andijan in a broader context, starting with Uzbekistan's independence after the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and progressing onward with the development of indigenous political movements and the post-Soviet rise of Islam in Central Asia.

Polat gives an in-depth description of events both preceding and following the demonstrations, armed attacks and subsequent government response quelling the disturbance. No topic is too

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sensitive, from government policies to the statements by the leaders of the unrest themselves. Every available piece of open source evidence, from interviews to videos as well as a number of studies by Western specialists in the aftermath of the insurrection, has been painstakingly analyzed and incorporated into this paper.

The study unearths many previously unknown facts surrounding the events and evaluates the commentaries from all sides, including government officials, eyewitnesses, journalists and academics. In every instance, what shines through most strongly in this study is the author's persistent ambition to uncover the truth, while remaining as objective as possible—an accomplishment made all the more remarkable by his previous experiences. No one who reads this report, from U.S. and Uzbek government officials to human rights activists, will fail to be informed and educated about many hitherto unknown facts about those pivotal events in the Ferghana Valley. The study concludes with the author's recommendations, placing the events in a rational, dispassionate context, which aims for the resumption of dialogue and rapprochement between Tashkent and Western governments, most notably the United States.

For all of the reasons enumerated above, this remarkable work should be essential reading for those wishing to understand the dynamics post-Soviet Central Asia and its relations with both regional and Western governments.

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Uzbekistan's Geo-strategic Importance

Uzbekistan is a key geo-strategic nation in Central Asia, important for the United States because of its prime geographic location at the critical crossroads of China, Russia, the Middle East and South Asia. For over two millennia Central Asia, the heart of Eurasia, has functioned as an overland “silk road,” the western land route to and from China. With China’s rapid rise over the last decade as a global power, as a U.S. competitor and even as a potential opponent, Beijing has been trying to reestablish its historic strong influence and control over Central Asia, where it still has significant security and economic concerns. If the United States is to counter Chinese efforts, Washington must have a strong presence in the region.

Another contender for influence in Central Asia is Russia, the region’s historic neighbor and overlord. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia is slowly and steadily reemerging as a great power and attempting to regain its traditional influence over the region. Currently, Russia is a strategic ally of Uzbekistan and maintains close relations with other countries in the region.

Uzbekistan is also a major entryway to Afghanistan from the north. Five years after the overthrow of the Taliban, the nation remains unstable, with its strategic importance to the United States underlined by the presence of 25,945 American troops.

The natural resources of Central Asia and the Caspian guarantee that U.S., Chinese and Russian interests in the region will only grow. Proven oil and natural gas reserves have been estimated at up to 3% and 4% of the world’s total, respectively. By 2015, the oil output of Central Asia and the Caspian will meet or exceed Venezuela’s 2002 production, South America’s largest oil producer. Some estimates rate the Caspian region’s natural gas potential as even more significant than its oil potential. Regional proven natural gas reserves are estimated at 232 trillion cubic feet, comparable to those of Saudi Arabia. Uzbekistan is one of the top ten natural gas producing countries in the world. Though the region’s energy resources are less than those of the Persian Gulf or Russia, they will definitely play a stabilizing role in world energy prices and supplies in the future.¹ Continued access to uninterrupted energy supplies is as crucial for sustaining American prosperity, as it is the Achilles’ heel of Chinese and Indian economic growth. The energy reserves of Central Asia, its neighbor Iran and the Caspian are of tremendous strategic importance not only to China, Russia and the United States, but also to Japan, India and the European Union. As great nations vie with one another for the region’s vast energy reserves, Uzbekistan’s strategic position grants access—or prevents control—of existing and potential Central Asian pipeline routes linking Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and the West.

Additionally, Uzbekistan has other mineralogical assets. In fact, it was the main supplier of uranium for the Soviet Union. The question of who controls the strategic resources of uranium is very important despite receiving little attention in the international and even local press. Uzbekistan also produces about 70 metric tons of gold annually.

By virtue of demography and geography Uzbekistan is the most crucial nation in the region. Uzbekistan’s 27 million citizens have a strong sense of statehood, with the potential to provide significant resistance to the threat of regional foreign domination or Islamist militancy. It is the most populous country in the region and shares borders with all the other Central Asian nations. There are significant Uzbek minorities in all of the other Central Asian states, including Afghanistan.

With a 99.3% literacy rate and a modernized and industrialized post-Soviet economy, Uzbekistan is a major player in a part of the world where Islam has a crucial role. A prosperous and democratic Uzbekistan could be an extremely important bridge between the Western and Muslim worlds.

In a darker turn of events, however, Uzbekistan and the region could see the rise of bloody conflicts, either internal

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or with neighboring countries, aimed at establishing control over limited resources such as water, energy and land. Other possible scenarios for internal conflicts include the establishment of a radical Islamic or extremist nationalist regime. In the absence of an ongoing and sustained U.S. presence, the region will likely move in a highly undesirable direction and potentially threaten the United States' regional interests. In contrast, a strong U.S. presence and ongoing positive engagement with Uzbekistan will help to promote American interests by constructing a stable and more democratic nation, which in turn would further regional cooperation and the region's greater integration into the international community.

Even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, Uzbekistan moved more swiftly than any other Central Asian nation to develop ties with the United States. Tashkent allowed drone over-flights of Afghanistan to observe al-Qaeda camps. Uzbek troops were a major component of the Centrasbat joint military exercises and NATO's other partnership and cooperation programs. Many Uzbek officers have been trained at U.S. military facilities and many students from Uzbekistan have attended American universities. Strong Uzbek-U.S. interaction came at the expense of Russian interest in Uzbekistan.

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Road to Andijan

From 1998 to 1999, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) emerged, backed by the Taliban and with ties to al-Qaeda. The IMU grew out of a number of militant groups, some of them radical, arising shortly before and after the 1991 collapse of communism. These groups included the Islamic "Adolat" (Justice) militia and associated groups: "Tavba" (Repentance) and "Islom Lashkari" (The Army of Islam), which, led by Tahir Yuldashev (Tohir Yoldosh), emerged in Namangan, Uzbekistan's Ferghana province. Initially these groups were non-violent (despite one calling itself The Army of Islam), but advocated establishing an Islamic state. In June 1990, Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian republic to declare that its own laws had sovereignty over those of the Soviet government. In March 1992, President Islam (Islom) Karimov's government banned Namangan's Islamist organizations, and after several of their members were jailed, the parties slowly became more militant and willing to use violence to achieve their goals, which they viewed simply as self-defense.

In early December 1991, during Uzbekistan's first post-Soviet presidential elections, these groups in conjunction with a number of moderate Muslim leaders organized peaceful demonstrations in Namangan. The day before the protests began, Karimov, whom the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic had elected president in March 1990, met with government-selected representative "voters," i.e. mostly government officials, which a sanitized report on Uzbek state TV evening news, nevertheless, presented as a meeting with local constituents. In reality, four local representatives selected by Namangan's mosques were barred from attending.

Karimov, after returning to Tashkent, flew back to Namangan and met with demonstrators led by Yuldashev, who were occupying the regional government building. During the meeting Karimov was accompanied by only one or two bodyguards. Yuldashev produced a ten-point list of demands, including that Karimov should immediately declare Uzbekistan an Islamic state. Karimov replied that Uzbekistan had a constitution and such major changes should be first discussed publicly prior to being voted on by Parliament.²

Karimov did honor one of his promises to Yuldashev—after winning the elections, Karimov used both the Quran and the Uzbek Constitution during his swearing-in ceremony.

According to reliable reports, during the mid 1990s Yuldashev established close ties to Muhammad Solih, leader of one of the Uzbek opposition groups and Karimov's chosen opposition candidate for the December 1991 presidential elections, who was then living in self-imposed exile in Turkey. After the Taliban's failure to acquire political and diplomatic recognition in the wake of its 1996 capture of Kabul, Yuldashev understood that he needed allies among "secular-democratic" opposition leaders like Solih if he was ever to become more legitimate in the eyes of his fellow

Uzbeks and the world and seize power from Karimov. Yuldashev realized that he had to ally himself with known “democratic” oppositionists to gain wider recognition home and abroad. Most prominent opposition leaders living in exile in Turkey refused Yuldashev’s offer to join forces with him, possibly remembering similar alliances from Tajikistan in the early 1990s, when the small indigenous opposition with a secular-nationalist-democratic agenda allied itself to a “united” opposition dominated and led by Islamists. As a result, Yuldashev subsequently only gained covert political support from Solih and a small group of his associates.

It is impossible to determine which came first: whether governmental repression of these prominent opposition groups radicalized them or if Karimov’s regime concluded that it had no choice other than to suppress extremists. Experts’ opinions are divided, with some specialists arguing that Karimov and his predecessors actually tolerated and initially sponsored Uzbekistan’s swift Islamic revival during the late 1980s through the early 1990s, inadvertently opening Pandora’s Box.

The Uzbek government’s pressure on Yuldashev increased exponentially after the IMU’s first major alleged attack in February 16, 1999, when five to six cars full of homemade explosives detonated in the center of Tashkent, all exploding within one or two hours of each other. One of the vehicles exploded at the entrance of the building of the Cabinet of Ministers, at the time when Karimov’s limousine was expected to arrive for a high-level governmental meeting. Most reliable analysts believe that the attacks were organized by the IMU with the aim of killing Karimov. The plotters hoped that in the wake of his death, if the IMU came to power, Solih would become a figurehead President, whose presence would be acceptable to many in the country and abroad, even though the IMU would hold the real authority. The author has concluded after studying the events of February 16 in depth that Solih was largely “out of the loop” on the operation and was uninvolved in the military planning of the attack and its execution and most likely only knew about it in the most general sense.

After the plot failed, the Uzbek government charged Solih as one of the conspirators. Turkish President Suleyman Demirel, while denying that Solih was in Turkey, subsequently permitted him to immigrate to Norway as a political refugee. Solih was tried in absentia and sentenced to 15 and a half years imprisonment. As Solih did not get a fair trial, the level of his involvement in the plot and his previous ties to the IMU remain murky. However, after the failure of the February 1999 coup attempt, Solih’s cooperation with Yuldashev is believed by most analysts to have dropped off dramatically, and the September 11 attacks apparently ended their relationship completely.

Following the inevitable government crackdown in the wake of the failed coup, in August-September 1999 the IMU from its base of operations in Tajikistan attempted to cross Kyrgyzstan’s southern Batken region in order to operate in the Uzbek-populated parts of the Ferghana Valley, mounting operations into Uzbekistan itself the following year.

In response, Uzbekistan extended its anti-terrorist operations beyond its borders. Since the emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, Tashkent openly supported the opposition, the Northern Alliance and in particular the forces of Afghan-Uzbek warlord General Abdul-Rashid Dostum. Besides the Karimov government’s immediate concerns in neighboring countries, it also wanted to retain its distance from Moscow. These tactical and strategic imperatives smoothed the way for Uzbekistan’s subsequent cooperation with the United States.

In August 2000, after IMU fighters briefly detained four American mountain climbers in Kyrgyzstan, the Clinton administration added the IMU to its list of foreign terrorist organizations. Details of the incident remain unclear, including whether the U.S. climbers escaped or were released by the IMU guerrillas. There is little indication that the Americans were intentionally taken hostage; instead, it seems more likely that they were unfortunate enough to be “in the wrong place at the wrong time” during the military confrontation. While the incident initially landed the IMU on Washington’s list of foreign terrorist organizations, September 11

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and the IMU's continued ties to the Taliban and al-Qaeda, even after the onset of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan in November 2001, continue to justify the 2000 finding.

Beginning in November 2001, the U.S.-led Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan decimated the IMU elements there, with reports that IMU military commander Juma (Zhuma) Namangoni (Namangani) was among the casualties. IMU remnants subsequently fled across the border to Pakistan's turbulent Northwest Frontier Province, where March 2007 clashes between Yuldashev and his followers and local tribesmen in Waziristan are a reminder that the IMU is hardly a spent force.

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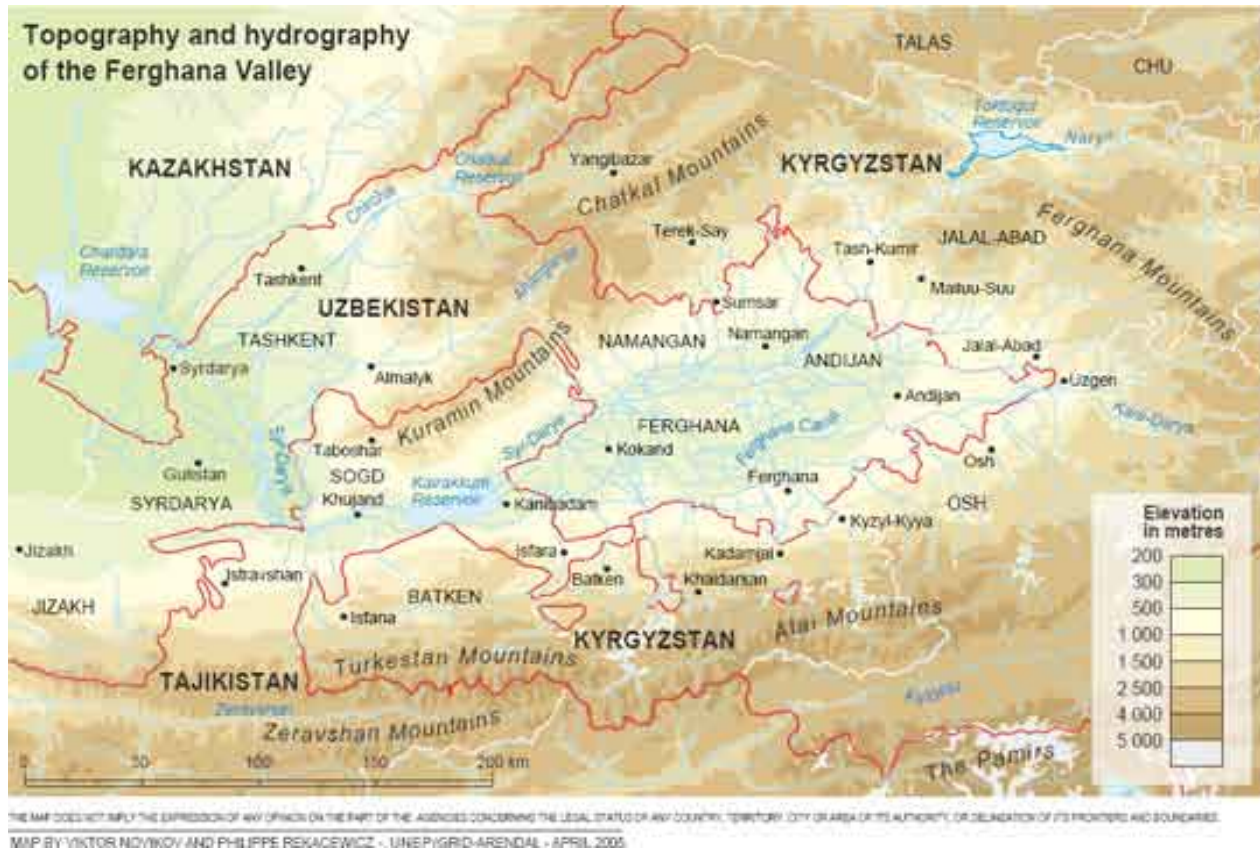
Based on their mutual goals, in the aftermath of September 11 and until the tragic May 2005 events in Andijan (Andijon), U.S.-Uzbek ties prospered and became much deeper. On October 7, 2001, less than a month after the September 11 attacks, Karimov signed a bilateral agreement with Washington allowing the U.S. military to use Uzbekistan's Karshi-Khanabad (Qarshi-Honobod, or K-2) air base, located less than 100 miles from Afghanistan's northern border, rent-free.

Despite the growing closeness between Washington and Tashkent in the aftermath of September 11, tensions remained in the relationship, particularly over the terms of the U.S. K-2 air base lease, Washington's support for opposition groups and increasing State Department pressure to liberalize Tashkent's human rights practices and political system. The strains increased after the 2003-2004 Color Revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine and deepened after the March 2005 Tulip Revolution in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. The final rupture occurred following the May 2005 bloody confrontation in Andijan, which profoundly soured U.S.-Uzbek relations, with extremely negative reverberations that continue to poison relations to the present day. Was the tragedy in Andijan a massacre of peaceful demonstrators or a suppression of militant Islamists? Many in Washington insist on the former interpretation, while Tashkent stoutly defends the latter version of events. What is the real truth of the matter?

The incident represented the biggest confrontation between Uzbek security forces, armed rebels and anti-government protesters since the country gained independence in December 1991. The trouble began on the night of May 12, 2005, when an armed group, most likely supporters of the 23 defendants on trial who since 2004 were being held in detention, attacked a police station and then a military base. Following their success, they then took their weapons, which they had acquired in the previous assault, and stormed the prison in Andijan, the highest-level and most secure penal facility in the country, where the defendants were being held. They released more than 500 prisoners, some of whom joined the rioters. The gunmen then assaulted Andijan's provincial security service and police headquarters and seized the governor's office. The rebels killed dozens of police and soldiers, took dozens more hostages and captured a huge amount of ammunition and about 100 submachine guns.

The next day, their numbers swelled by 1,000 to 2,000 unarmed protesters. The militants continued to attack military symbols of the government and seized three government BTR military vehicles.³ The rebels gained control over most of downtown Andijan for nearly a day. Insurgents used both hostages and volunteers as human shields. Many of the volunteers were women and children, who perhaps did not realize the imminent danger in which their actions placed them. After fruitless negotiations by phone between the leaders of the rebellion and the Minister of Internal Affairs, the government troops suppressed the insurgency, perhaps brutally and indiscriminately, but effectively—killing hundreds, including many unarmed protesters.

The Ferghana Valley: Roots of the Andijan Confrontation



The events in the Ferghana Valley that day did not happen in a vacuum. The southern Kyrgyz cities of Jalalabad and Osh are about 45-65 miles from Andijan. Located just across the border, the two cities contain significant Uzbek majorities with close familial ties to their ethnic brethren in Uzbekistan, especially in Andijan. The two cities were centers of the March 2005 Tulip Revolution in southern Kyrgyzstan, which ended with President Askar Akayev fleeing the country after nearly 15 years in power. Cultural, economic and trade connections between the two cities and Kyrgyzstan's and Tajikistan's other settlements with significant Uzbek minorities and Andijan are very close.

For centuries, the Ferghana Valley, now divided between the post-Soviet states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, had been a unique territory with integrated economic and cultural ties. Before Russia's conquest and colonization, which began in the 1860s, the Ferghana Valley was the epicenter of the Kokand Khanate. After its conquest, the Russians maintained the Ferghana Valley as a unified administrative territory; however, after the 1917 Revolution, the Soviet government arbitrarily divided the Ferghana Valley between the Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik republics. Despite Moscow's arbitrary divisions, the borders, in reality, remained porous and largely non-existent, similar to the borders between American states. As a result, throughout both the Soviet period and post-Soviet independence, the Kyrgyz and Tajik inhabitants of Ferghana were closer in many ways to their Uzbek, valley compatriots than to their fellow Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens.

Travel difficulties have added to the problems faced by post-Soviet Kyrgyz and Tajik authorities in asserting national sovereignty and maintaining centralized control in Ferghana. Mountain passes in both countries out of Ferghana to the east and south toward Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan remain difficult except during the brief summer season. As a result, even now the major transportation links between these territories and Bishkek

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or Dushanbe consist largely of air flights. On the other hand, rail and road transportation out of the Ferghana Valley transit Uzbekistan. The resultant geographical conundrum combined with the hardening of the arbitrary Soviet-era frontiers means that the Valley's western corridor is its sole easily accessible route, running toward central Uzbekistan and briefly transiting Tajik territory because of convoluted frontiers. Tashkent, nevertheless, in 1996-1998, had to build a tunnel through its highest mountain pass to the Valley to ease transportation links, which made the passage that was nearly impassible a decade ago during the winter, open nearly year-round. An understanding of these geographical peculiarities and realities is crucial to interpreting the May 2005 disturbances in Andijan.

Uzbekistan's Ferghana region remained staunchly conservative after the 1991 collapse of communism, unlike cosmopolitan Tashkent. The Ferghana Valley is the epicenter of religious conservatism, particularly since Russian colonization began in the late 19th century. It was one of the first cores of anti-Russian and then anti-Soviet resistance, espousing Islamic and national independence slogans until the mid to late 1930s, even after Moscow finally quelled the so-called "basmachi" (bandit) revolts. Despite the fact that a strong Soviet social-political order was imposed during the following decade, Ferghana retained its primacy as one of Central Asia's major centers of Islamic education and learning. The only regional Islamic higher and special secondary education institutions permitted (and in reality controlled by the Soviet government) are Tashkent's Islamic Institute and a madrassa in Bukhara, both of which were outside the valley. Ferghana representatives made up the majority of both "officially" approved clergy and "underground" and independent Muslim educators.

Gorbachev's late 1980s "glasnost" policy fostered the reemergence of Islam in many parts of the Soviet Union, most notably in the Ferghana Valley. Muslim movements there ranged across a spectrum, from moderate and largely loyal to the existing state system to militant and radical. Uzbek Ferghana Valley moderates included Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, head of the official Islamic clergy of Central Asia in 1989-1993 and still regarded even by his opponents as Uzbekistan's and the region's undisputed preeminent religious scholar and leader. Radicals from Ferghana included: IMU leaders Yuldashev and Namangoniy, both from Namangan province, and Andijan's Abduvali qori Mirzaev, who was considered by both the government and the public to be the leader of Wahhabism in Uzbekistan. Mirzaev, known by most Uzbeks simply as Abduvali qori, had headed Andijan's largest mosque since the late 1980s, when the Uzbek government relaxed its restrictions on religious life, until 1995. His Friday sermons and audiocassette recordings were very popular, particularly among more independent and opposition-minded Muslims. In August 1995, Abduvali qori disappeared after checking in at Tashkent airport to fly to Moscow, where he was scheduled to address an Islamic conference. Passengers aboard the Moscow-bound flight said they saw him checking-in, but did not see him board the aircraft. Since then, no reliable information about what happened to him has surfaced. Another well-known and respected Muslim opponent of the Uzbek government, who also has deep roots in Ferghana Valley, is Obidkhon qori Nazarov, who spent 1998-2006 in hiding in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. He has subsequently been allowed to settle in Europe as a political refugee.

Kokand and Marghilan are two other Uzbek Ferghana Valley cities where influential Islamic groups have emerged. Also Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation), a self-professed non-violent and anti-American extremist Islamic party working toward establishing a global caliphate, has strong roots in Ferghana.

What Happened in Andijan?

The road to Andijan's bloody confrontation began in the summer of 2004, when Uzbek security forces arrested 23 young men in Andijan, many of whom were senior employees or directors of successful local businesses. Authorities charged them with organizing an illegal religious extremist group "Akramiya" and subverting the constitutional order.⁴ In light of conditions in Uzbekistan, it is quite possible that the accused men were innocent. Local authorities may simply have decided to take over the arrested men's successful businesses.

According to several fairly credible reports, these businessmen had close ties to the former governor of the province and his associates. New local authorities may have cynically used the ongoing government campaign of suppressing Islamists as an excuse for co-opting the enterprises. Such practices are not uncommon in Uzbekistan and other former Soviet countries.

It is equally possible that the government may have tried to prevent the group from becoming too wealthy and independent of state control. Authorities were alarmed that the accused were devout Muslims and were treating both their employees and the local poor according to Islamic tradition. It is also possible that the Uzbek government's assertions that the arrested men were participating in or funding extremist groups were correct. The Akramiya trials began in Andijan in February 2005.

Each day that the court was in session relatives and employees of the accused men gathered across the street from the court for organized silent protests, sitting quietly to show solidarity with the defendants.⁵ In Uzbekistan, such protests by relatives of those arrested and arraigned on charges of being Islamic extremists are not uncommon, but they usually last only two to three days and attract few demonstrators. One of the reasons why the Andijan protesters were outside the court was the fact that authorities, legitimately claiming limited space, only permitted two relatives of each defendant to attend.

The following month the number of protestors began to swell after events in neighboring Kyrgyzstan toppled the regime of President Askar Akayev. The Color Revolutions in 2003-2005 in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan convinced Karimov and Uzbekistan's ruling elite that rapid democratization could threaten their rule. As stated earlier, Andijan is only a few dozen miles from Kyrgyzstan's portion of the Ferghana Valley with its significant Uzbek minority, where the unrest, which roiled Bishkek and eventually forced Akayev to flee to Moscow, began. The Georgian Rose Revolution in November 2003 in particular rang alarm bells for Karimov. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze had enjoyed extensive favorable Western publicity as Gorbachev's Foreign Minister protégé in reducing U.S.-Soviet Cold War tensions. Shevardnadze's favorable image had allowed him to establish a much closer working relationship with Washington than Karimov. If Shevardnadze could be ousted, what were America's true intentions toward the rest of the "post-Soviet" space? Tashkent's next wake-up call was the November 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, which brought Viktor Yushchenko's victory over Moscow's preferred candidate Viktor Yanukovich. In both revolutions, Washington helped finance and train opposition groups. Both new leaders were regarded as overtly pro-American and pro-European.

While Uzbekistan had already experienced some demonstrations and even riots brought about by declining social-economic conditions after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Andijan protests were notable because for the first time in the history of the country the demonstrations continued for nearly three months. By May 11, the number of protestors had grown considerably. Sources of all political persuasions are in broad agreement that both the protesters and regional Uzbek government officials continued to behave peaceably. Igor Rotar, a well-respected Russian journalist and expert on Central Asia, who has not only traveled extensively in Central Asia, but also lived there, reporting for Forum 18 and The Jamestown Foundation, wrote, "as far as Forum 18 could ascertain from speaking between May 31 and June 7 to eyewitnesses in Andijan and refugees in Kyrgyzstan, virtually all those gathered on the square were employees of the detained businessmen. Interestingly, the businessmen had promised to pay staff who attended the meeting as if it were a working day. Moreover, Forum 18 established that the businessmen's relatives had organized transport to bring those unhappy with Karimov's regime from outlying areas."⁶

Although the crowds around the court were peaceful and orderly as the proceedings neared their end on May 11, supporters of the accused reportedly warned that they would not take a guilty verdict lying down.⁷ According to reports from sources sympathetic to the defendants and critical of the government, the relatives of those on trial were preparing for more decisive action. "We are ready for any actions in order to free our

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innocent brothers,” said Husanboy Shokirov, brother of one of the defendants.⁸ It was reported from the court that one of the accused, Tursun Nazarov, said, “If we are sentenced, our families will not just sit twiddling their thumbs.”⁹ A supporter of the defendants said presciently, “If the sentence is unjust, we will be forced to act. We are now waiting.” He added, “We are not a mob; we’re intelligent people, so we are awaiting the sentence.”¹⁰ Despite intermittent media reports of the demonstrators’ threats prior to the tragic events in Andijan in May 2005, the author of this study has been unable to find any mention of these purported threats in the many policy and advocacy papers and commentaries that were published in the immediate aftermath of the events in Andijan and later.

Patience was overtaken by events; however, as an armed insurrection broke out before the final verdicts were issued. According to local human rights activist Saidjahon Zaynobitdinov, prosecutors requested that the judge free three of the defendants and proposed relatively minor jail terms for the other men accused.¹¹ Prosecutors recommended that those found guilty receive sentences of three to seven years, far lighter than the usual verdicts handed down in earlier similar trials.¹² Andijan Province Deputy Attorney General Mirzo-Ulughbek Zokirov, representing the prosecution, requested that the presiding judge dismiss the most serious charge—attempting to subvert the constitutional order—as it had not been proven during the trial.¹³

It is probable that the authorities became increasingly frightened both by the rising scale of protests and the protest leaders’ warnings and threats about taking more concrete action if the defendants were found guilty and jailed. In any case, the prosecution requested relatively light sentences¹⁴ and the judge was planning on giving even briefer periods of incarceration.¹⁵ It also seems apparent that the government began taking precautionary and preemptive measures against protest organizers and even arrested some of them.¹⁶

Many critics of the Uzbek government reported that the alleged arrests of some of the protesters were the primary reason that the demonstrations turned violent.¹⁷

It seems evident that the news or rumors about the arrest of demonstrators on May 12—regardless whether they were true or not—may have hastened the beginning of the uprising. However, the theory that the uprising was a spontaneous response to the May 12 arrests is too weak. It is clearly impossible to organize a military operation as massive as the one organized on May 12 to 13 in just a few short hours—an uprising on the scale of the one that occurred in Andijan would require many days, if not weeks, of preparation.

Forcing authorities to release several, if not most of the defendants and seeing the remainder given much milder sentences in comparison to similar cases could have been a major success for the Andijan demonstrators. In retrospect, it seems that extremists probably miscalculated their level of popular support and thus decided that it was time for an armed military insurgency as the prelude to triggering a broader people’s revolution.

Two overlooked factors are essential to understanding the armed confrontation in Andijan. The first are the threats about more aggressive action made by some demonstrators if their demands were not met, who up to that point had remained nonviolent. The second factor is the government’s dismissal of a number of the more serious charges against the defendants even as it apparently planned to issue greatly reduced sentences to those found guilty, possibly even releasing a majority of the defendants as innocent on unproven charges, or more likely, subsequently giving amnesty to those who might have then received relatively minor prison sentences, or sentencing them to jail terms equal to the time they already served since their initial detention in 2004. Such examples of judicial ruling are not uncommon in Uzbekistan. Professor Bakhtiyor Bobojonov, an Uzbek semi-independent expert on Islamic movements in Uzbekistan with a reputation for academic integrity, who works for the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, stated that months after the Andijan tragedy he was shown the judge’s ruling on the 23 defendants. According to Bobojonov, the court verdict that he reviewed stipulated the release of several defendants and handed down less severe sentences for the remainder of the accused than

those requested by prosecution.

Despite the importance in retrospect of these two factors, most experts, reporters, analysts, journalists, human rights advocates, lobbyists and others who wrote about the Andijan tragedy in its immediate aftermath initially largely overlooked these elements. To the best knowledge of the author, even such pragmatic experts as Dr. Shirin Akiner, Dr. John C. K. Daly and Dr. S. Frederick Starr overlooked these two factors. Some human rights lobbyists continue to maintain, however, that armed insurgency was “in response” to the alleged May 12 arrests of demonstrators.¹⁸ It should be noted again that the scope of the insurgents’ military operation during the night of May 12 makes it most unlikely that it was spontaneously prepared in a few short hours.

After deciding some time during the evening of May 12 to proceed with their military operation, a group of armed men began by attacking a police station and then a military barracks, killing a dozen government personnel. According to a number of contemporary accounts, they seized up to 100 submachine guns along with a significant amount of ammunition. Despite many reports’ contradictory timelines, the insurgents then attacked Andijan’s prison, the largest maximum security facility in the country, and released about 500 inmates. The 23 defendants were among those liberated from their cells, along with apparent religious and political prisoners, common criminals, murder suspects and convicted murderers.¹⁹ The independent opposition website www.fergana.ru reported that one of the freed inmates, serving a lengthy prison sentence after being convicted of several murders, escaped and committed another murder before being recaptured.²⁰ The dramatic breakout buoyed the insurgents’ spirits and set the scene for radicalizing an opposition rally planned for the next day.²¹ Young people who joined the May 13 protest formed an informal militia, policing the roads into the city center within a three-mile radius of downtown.²²

Hostages and Human Shields

The Institute for War and Peace Reporting wrote, “Andijan residents were drawn to the scene, some out of curiosity but others to lend their support.”²³ It seems very unlikely, however, that any significant percentage of the demonstrators came to the square merely “out of curiosity.” First, most of the people in Andijan and the surrounding areas had heard the exchange of gunfire and the fighting between rebels and government forces the previous night. It is also highly unlikely that people who crowded into the square did not see that gunmen had already seized the hokimiyat, the regional governor’s headquarters.

During the demonstration in Andijan’s central Bobur Square, the insurgents’ first demand was the immediate release of Akramiya founder Akrom Yuldashev (Yuldosh) from a detention center in the capital, where he had been incarcerated for allegedly organizing the February 1999 terrorist bombings in Tashkent.²⁴

The insurgents also seized hostages. According to eyewitnesses interviewed by Rotar, “Akramiya members who had acquired weapons did not prevent free movement out of the square by those gathered there, but their attitude to the hostages did not meet international standards for the treatment of prisoners of war. Forum 18 learned that several hostages received severe beatings. The hostages had wire tied round their necks and were placed at the perimeter of the square as human shields. Therefore the first to die from the shots fired by Uzbek government forces were the hostages.”²⁵

Many eyewitnesses confirm that the rioters took about 30 hostages, which included members of the police, SNB officers, government officials and others who the rebels considered “provocateurs,” to serve as human shields.²⁶ Most of these eyewitnesses clearly sympathized with the rebels. The mood swiftly turned ugly, as city prosecutor Ghanijan Abdurahimov was beaten to death by the crowd.²⁷ Insurgents used both hostages and volunteers—women with children—as human shields. In retrospect, it seems unlikely that the bulk of the volunteers realized the danger they were putting themselves in even as the rebel leaders failed to consider the

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peril in which they were placing the unarmed people.

Some reports suggest that the hostages included some of the prisoners earlier liberated from the local jail, along with several human rights defenders who tried to mediate an end to the crisis.²⁸ Further details come from local human rights activist Qodirjon Ergashev, who visited the government administrative offices seized by the protesters.²⁹ Ergashev counted about 50 men between 20 and 40 years-old inside and outside the building, all armed with Kalashnikov automatic rifles. Inside the building, Ergashev saw several policemen and government officials tied up, noting, “Some armed men were preparing Molotov cocktails, and some were beating the hell out of police and security officers they had captured.”

Ergashev was subsequently taken to meet the uprising’s leader, Sharifjon Shokirov, whose elder brother was one of the 23 defendants. Ergashev told Shokirov that his actions forfeited the goodwill of the global community, saying, “The entire world community was on your side. You were supported everywhere, and now I saw dead bodies outside this building.” According to Ergashev, Shokirov replied that there was no alternative but armed resistance. Ergashev then tried to leave, but was instead taken prisoner. Later, as government forces closed in on the square packed with demonstrators, Ergashev and about 30 other hostages were tied together at the head of a huge column of demonstrators moving out of the center of town. “Hostages first, then unarmed civilians, then armed men. Only four hostages survived after an armored personnel carrier opened fire on the crowd,” Ergashev said.³⁰ While held hostage, Ergashev was beaten and received wounds to his shoulder.³¹ Another human rights activist in Andijan, Ortiqali Rahmatov, Ergashev’s deputy and colleague, who tried to mediate with rebels, was shot and killed by insurgents.³²

According to IWPR reports, the streets surrounding the square filled with men, some carrying guns. Their numbers soon swelled by hundreds of others calling for jobs, fair wages and reasonable prices for goods, services and utilities, along with demands for justice and freedom. Some criticized Karimov and his government and demanded their removal. The majority of those flooding Andijan’s streets apparently sympathized with the rebels.

The Uzbek Government Reacts

The government’s determined reaction to such provocation became predictable and inevitable. Some rebels with a dawning sense of realism told reporters that they understood that the government would not compromise with them after what they did.³³ After fruitless phone calls between Uzbek Minister of Internal Affairs Zokir Almatov and rebel leader Qobiljon Parpiev, government troops moved in and killed 100 or more armed insurgents and many more unarmed sympathizers.³⁴

Karimov himself flew to Andijan that day. Though his Minister of Internal Affairs conducted talks over the phone with the rebel leaders, Karimov personally handled the situation, just as he had done before in December 1991 in Namangan and immediately after the February 1999 car bombings in Tashkent.

Some sources critical of the government claimed that the government troops opened fire first without warning the crowd of protesters and armed insurgents. Other sources reported that the gunmen opened fire first, forcing the troops to respond in kind to end the rebellion. Eyewitness accounts are not reliable, as they are heavily influenced by their sympathies and interests, as well as where they were during the final confrontation.

Western journalists noted with growing alarm that the violence subsequently appeared to be spreading to neighboring towns, raising fears that the volatile Central Asian state could erupt in full-scale revolution.³⁵ Analysts commented that Uzbekistan’s marginal, weak and divided opposition with secular-democratic slogans could be swiftly overtaken by rapidly developing events and that such a revolution could slide into

chaos or anarchy, overthrowing the Karimov government and bringing a radical Islamic or nationalist regime to power.

The final death toll of unarmed protesters killed by government troops remains unknown. A number of independent experts enjoying “good relations” with Tashkent corroborate the Uzbek government’s claim that about 200 people in all had been killed, among them government officials, armed rebels, hostages and unarmed demonstrators. Anti-Karimov elements claim that the actual death toll was far higher, with estimates ranging from a low of about 500 to more than 5,000 dead, an obviously exaggerated figure.

Tashkent immediately went on the offensive, with Karimov holding a press conference the next day. The President said that he arrived in Andijan at 7:30 in the morning, after being briefed by the Interior Minister Almatov at 1:45 the same morning, adding that he only sent in the troops at 6:00 in the evening. The Uzbek authorities demanded the release of the hostages and guaranteed law enforcement bodies would not interfere, but would instead provide buses to allow the guerillas to leave town. According to Karimov, the leader of the group initially agreed to depart and only demanded the release of six inmates, to which the Uzbek authorities agreed. Karimov stated that later the group changed their demands to include the release of all their counterparts jailed across Uzbekistan, and added political demands. At that point the negotiations broke down, as Tashkent believed that acceding to the new demands would spark similar hostage takings across the country, and that no country in the world could or would accept such conditions. Uzbek authorities tapped and recorded the mobile phone conversations that the insurgent leaders had with other rebels and contacts in Afghanistan and Osh and Jalalabad in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. At 1:00 in the afternoon, the Uzbek authorities asked the group either to leave town or turn in their weapons and return home. Five hours later, government troops surrounded the hokimiyat. Karimov told his audience that the events in Andijan had been in the works for the last three to six months by Hizb ut-Tahrir and Akramiya insurgents in southern Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley. The Uzbek leader criticized foreign journalists who called the Andijan events a “democratic revolution,” stating that the country was opposed to such types of revolutions and instead supported an evolutionary democratic path of development as forcing democratic reforms could result in radical Islamic groups coming to power.

Conflicting Interpretations of Andijan

In light of Tashkent’s reticence and reluctance to disclose its information on the events in Andijan, independent assessments have assumed greater importance. Dr. Shirin Akiner, a lecturer in Central Asian Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and an Associate Fellow of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, who besides Rotar conducted one of the few relatively independent on-site fact-finding studies in the immediate aftermath of the Andijan tragedy, arrived there on May 25, less than two weeks after the events and interviewed nearly 40 individuals. Akiner received assistance from the Uzbek authorities, and her findings support many claims of the Uzbek government. Some of her findings, such as that Bobur Square, where the hokimiyat administrative offices are located, is too constricted to hold 4,000 people, are reliable, as they are easily verified and confirmed by a map of Andijan’s center provided in the Human Rights Watch report.³⁶ Another Western observer, German freelance reporter Marcus Bensmann, who has consistently been critical of the Karimov regime and sympathetic to the Uzbek opposition, was an eyewitness to the confrontation in Andijan and disagrees with Akiner’s assertions.³⁷

A year after the tragic confrontation in Andijan, the Uzbek government tardily began releasing selected video imagery shot by the rioters themselves. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace subsequently made them available for public viewing on its website.

As Akiner’s observations on the size of the square are correct and the number of protesters on the videotapes made by insurgents also indicates that their numbers were likely no more than 1,000 to 2,000, the number of

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dead must necessarily be much smaller than the figures reported by the human rights community and Western media.

The images present a very different picture of events in the square from the majority of foreign press reports 12 months earlier. The video clearly shows armed insurgents among protesters, while “Allahu Akbar!” (Allah is Great!) is repeatedly shouted to inspire the crowd. The insurgents’ videos clearly show that Bobur Square and its surrounding were more than half empty, while people—some with assault rifles and posing before camera—walked freely in mostly empty areas. The videos also captured images of individuals with submachine guns on the roof of the governor’s headquarters and other insurgents calling for more people to come to the square and expressing satisfaction that their calls were successful. In the videos, shots fired into the air are clearly heard, but some of the sounds could also be warning shots fired by government troops. Agitators told the crowd that they should not be afraid, because troops would only fire overhead and not on them, but added ominously that there would be no victory without human losses.³⁹ In hindsight it is fair to say that these were highly irresponsible instructions not only in light of what happened a couple hours later, but also based on common sense and what was assumed, rightly or wrongly, of Karimov and his government as brutal and oppressive. Not only in Uzbekistan, but also throughout the world, it was predictable that if an insurrectionary crowd killing government officials, brandishing weapons and taking hostages does not obey legitimate orders to disperse, then troops could resort to stiff measures to suppress demonstrations. The video evidence supports Tashkent’s allegations that demonstrators were hardly concerned in quieting the situation. The films plainly show clouds of smoke from the building burning near the square, but with no evidence that the demonstrators tried to fight the fires; instead, protesters took firefighters hostage. The videos also clearly confirm anecdotal evidence previously reported, but largely ignored in the aftermath of Andijan, that the mutineers were actively preparing Molotov cocktails.

The video evidence directly contradicts Bensmann’s subsequent testimony on May 11, 2006 to a European Parliamentary roundtable. Bensmann told his audience, “And I didn’t (hear) any outcry of ‘Allahu Akbar,’ demanding an Islamic state.”⁴⁰ With all due respect to the eyewitness testimony of a human rights advocate and reporter with sympathies to demonstrators and innocent victims, the video images of the day’s events should be given greater consideration. Though these video images could have been edited to omit footage that contradicted the government’s version of events, it is widely believed that they are authentic. Bensmann could be right: demonstrators did not release any written statements, and the establishment of an Islamic state was not mentioned among their demands made public. However, according to the insurgents’ video footage, shouts of “Allahu Akbar” were used to inspire the crowd and were frequently chanted by the demonstrators. Though we have insufficient information on the political orientation and ideas of rebel leaders and protesters, it is doubtless that they were motivated and tried their best to inspire the crowd with the name of Allah. In contrast, the video shows the crowd shouting “Ozodlik” (Freedom or Liberty) only a few times.

At the same roundtable, Galima Buharbaeva, an IWPR reporter who traveled from Tashkent to Andijan, was present for most of May 13 and witnessed the demonstration and its aftermath conceded that some of the people who attacked the prison the night before were among those who seized the hokimiyat the next day, but implied that they may have participated in the nighttime attack at the instigation of the Uzbek SNB (National Security Service). Buharbaeva testified, “When we interviewed people in the hokimiyat on May 13, they admitted that they had participated in the attack of the police station and the military garrison, had obtained weapons there, and were also present during the prison assault. They didn’t tell us that they had been encouraged to do so by law-enforcement agencies. But when we interviewed them two days earlier, on May 11—and we have audio—they said the special services (SNB) had been trying to convince them to start violence earlier.”⁴¹ To the best knowledge of this author, however, Buharbaeva has never released her audio recording of the interviews. A bullet hit Buharbaeva’s notebook during shooting, though there is no credible indication that she was specifically targeted. As a fortunate journalist in a conflict zone who survived the demonstration without

physical injury and was later allowed to leave Uzbekistan, she has since then changed her stories from her previous, more reliable and credible reports and has increasingly advocated an extremely one-sided agenda.

Vitaly Volkov, a Central Asia program correspondent for the German news agency Deutsche Welle supports the conspiracy theory that the SNB was behind the violent uprising in Andijan. Volkov told the same European Parliament roundtable that, “Information we acquired from the sources in the Uzbek SNB” indicated that “the crowd that came to the prison was led by officers of the local SNB who used to oversee institutions such as prisons. Approached by their former supervisors, the prison guards had simply opened the prison gates.”

RFE/RL correspondent Gulnoza Saidazimova reported, “Volkov believes the SNB then staged an assault in order to compromise the Interior Ministry. There is, he argues, a longstanding rivalry between the SNB and the Interior Ministry, whose heads represent two influential clans competing for political power in the country.”⁴²

Volkov’s theory is also flawed. Due to a longstanding rivalry between the SNB and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), it is highly unlikely that Andijan prison guards, controlled by the MIA, “had simply opened the prison gates” at the request of SNB officials, as the SNB never supervised Andijan’s jails or any other penal facility controlled by the MIA.

While rivalry between the USSR’s security service (KGB) and police forces dates back to the Soviet period, in independent Uzbekistan, unlike traditional Soviet practice, the SNB and MIA became roughly equal in power and influence. As a result, their leaders were in constant competition and received almost the same level of treatment from and access to the head of the state. During the early 1990s, the security services and military were increasingly distrusted by Karimov, as they had a much higher proportion of Russian and pro-Russian officers. Also during the Soviet era, they were subordinated directly to Moscow, with little control from Tashkent. At the same time, the MIA was traditionally more loyal to the republic’s leader and thus came under security service scrutiny. While having its own detention facilities, the SNB never had full authority to supervise jails because most of them were under MIA control. Only the Prosecutors Office had some supervisory authority over all Uzbek jails, including SNB and MIA detention centers.

While even conspiracy theories should be given some consideration, they should, nevertheless, be scrutinized for supporting evidence. Bensmann’s, Buharbaeva’s and Volkov’s assertions, though shared by many critics of the Uzbek government, have yet to be supported by documentary evidence.

Even if the following are true: that Volkov’s assertions that the material he “acquired from the sources in the Uzbek SNB” indicates that “the crowd that came to the prison was led by officers of the local SNB;” that rebels told Buharbaeva that “the special services had been trying to convince them to start violence earlier;” and that she has such audio recordings, all assertions, reports, etc. should be investigated, not just taken at face value. If the two reporters do not produce their documentary evidence, then their assertions seem to be incidents of reporters abusing their prerogative for protecting the confidentiality of their sources or mere propaganda.

Future Steps for the United States

Besides the video imagery shot by the insurgents themselves, another potentially crucial technical source may exist for determining the reality of May 13, as Bobur Square and surrounding areas may well have been photographed by United States National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) satellites. While the release of such images would obviously not undermine American security, the imagery has yet to be made public, as the NRO is notoriously reluctant to reveal its intelligence capabilities. The author strongly believes that the release of such forensic evidence is more important than Washington’s calls for a United Nations (UN) or an Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) international investigation. Instead of pressuring the Karimov

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regime to allow an international investigation the United States could instead provide detailed imagery of the day's events in Bobur Square two years ago.

If such images have not been taken, American taxpayers will have to ask “why.” At the time of the tragedy, Andijan was an important city midway between two major U.S. military bases in Central Asia, Uzbekistan's K-2 air base and Bishkek's Manas airfield. Such an unprecedented regional incident with military overtones which dwarfed even incidents during Tajikistan's 1992-1997 civil war, should have caught the attention of the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent and high ranking Defense and State Departments officials, as well as the CIA, to whom the NRO supplies imagery, if not the White House. Given the massive implications of the Andijan uprising not only for Uzbekistan, but also U.S. interests throughout the entire region, it would seem improbable that events there were not monitored as closely as possible by state of the art American technology. In the absence of such imagery, reliance largely on eyewitness accounts by those critical of the Uzbek government and special interest groups, while ignoring conflicting accounts, does not assist in determining the truth of what really happened in Andijan. The American public currently has no idea what was known at the time in Washington and what steps were taken to monitor the confrontation.

The release of such forensic evidence is more important than Washington's current calls for an international investigation. Instead of focusing exclusively on insisting on an international inquiry, the United States could present a number of satellite images of Bobur Square on May 13, 2005, that may provide a more accurate interpretation of the tragic events that occurred there. If such imagery underpinned Tashkent's accounts of that tragic day, the release of such data could go a long way toward repairing the damage that Andijan caused U.S.-Uzbek relations. If an analysis of the images proves the casualty claims made by the human rights community and the majority of the Western media, then the U.S. government's moral stand would finally be justified. If not, then America would find it in its interest to adjust its policy toward Uzbekistan accordingly and begin moving toward restoring the strategic partnership between the two countries. The issue is broader than U.S.-Uzbek relations; even if satellite imagery supported Washington's stance, the larger questions that the Bush and America's subsequent administrations should be asking themselves in the aftermath of Andijan are: whether the United States wants an Islamic revolution in Uzbekistan and does the United States have genuine interests there and in the surrounding region beyond solely human rights concerns?

As a result of the fact that the American government's and media and expert communities' criticism of the Uzbek government up to now has been largely based on biased, one-sided assessments of how the Andijan insurgency was crushed and focused primarily on the likely inflated number of dead demonstrators rather than the armed attacks and killings by the insurgents that preceded the government crackdown, U.S.-Uzbek relations have rapidly deteriorated. Two months after Andijan, America lost access to K-2. The facility was critical to the U.S.-led effort in Afghanistan, as it was less than 100 miles from the border; Manas, in contrast, is 500-600 miles from Afghanistan. If for no other reason than assisting U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, with which Uzbekistan shares a common border, images of Bobur Square should be released as a prelude to a possible return of U.S. forces to K-2.

Russia and China Fill the Vacuum

What is not in doubt is that in the aftermath of Andijan both Moscow and Beijing swiftly moved into the vacuum created by crumbling U.S.-Uzbek relations. Even before the tragic events in Andijan, Moscow was moving to reassert its traditional hegemonic military role in the region. In October 2004, Moscow secured a long-term contract for its military base in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, in addition to its Kant air base near Bishkek. In contrast to Russia's adroit diplomacy, Washington's relations with Kyrgyzstan over Manas, its sole remaining military base in Central Asia, have deteriorated over both the issues of rent and the killing on December 6, 2006 of a Kyrgyz national at the base.

For centuries, the image of Central Asia was that of an exotic, distant land, epitomized by the 1913 poetic line of the play “Hassan: The Story of Hassan of Baghdad and How he Came to Make the Golden Journey to Samarkand” by James Elroy Flecker, that describes a mysterious region of spices, silk and gold. Echoing the Great Game, Flecker’s verses are even inscribed on the clocktower of the barracks of the British Army’s 22nd Special Air Service regiment in Hereford, “We are the pilgrims Master, we shall go always a little further: it may be beyond that last blue mountain barred with snow: across that angry or that glimmering sea.” Unfortunately, for Uzbekistan and its neighbors, Washington and its allies, including Britain, continue to see Uzbekistan and its neighbors, particularly Afghanistan, where a rising insurgency is funded through billions of dollars generated by record-high opium crops and heroin trade, predominantly through the prism of military concerns, even as they support contradictory and ill-informed human rights policies which have inadvertently played into the hands of local radical anti-Western extremists.

The Soviet era saw the region walled off from Western contact. Modern Uzbekistan now needs less oriental exotica, hectoring rushes to judgement on human rights, and more dispassionate understanding of its realities, particularly from Washington, if the country and the region are to revive their ties with the West and battle their common enemy, Islamic extremism. The recent fighting in Waziristan proves that the IMU there is far from a spent force, while the rapid growth of Hizb ut-Tahrir across the region, with its call for the overthrow of regional secular governments and their replacement by a revived Caliphate, could have a global impact greater than Khomeini’s 1979 Islamic Revolution. Washington should consider carefully the possible violent overthrow of Tashkent’s post-Soviet government by Islamists and adjust its policies accordingly, unless it wants inadvertently to assist the possible emergence of a modern day Muslim caliph. For all of its flaws and shortcomings, the government of Uzbekistan is secular, and Washington’s shortsighted policies are encouraging the growth of anti-American sentiments there, most heavily promoted by militant Islamic fundamentalists.

Uzbek Decision-Making and Karimov’s Response

The month after September 11, the Uzbek government allowed the Pentagon the use of its K-2 airfield to support military operations in Afghanistan. Seven months later, in March 2002, Karimov, who had first visited Washington in June 1996 and met President Bill Clinton, came to the United States to meet President George W. Bush. At that meeting, the two countries signed a formal agreement on strategic partnership. Even before September 11, some people in Washington considered Tashkent as a possible leader in Central Asia. The United States quickly established close relations with Uzbekistan, and Tashkent swiftly became a Central Asia’s champion in distancing itself from Moscow and seeking closer relations not only with the United States, but also other Western democracies.

As in the aftermath of Andijan, U.S.-Uzbek relations are at their lowest level since 1992.

Therefore it is time to consider the following questions:

- Who lost Uzbekistan? And is this in the short or long-term interest of the United States?
- Is losing Uzbekistan worth other U.S. policy goals such as “human rights?”
- Is the United States’ negative and critical assessment of the state of human rights in Uzbekistan, including Tashkent’s handling of the Andijan confrontation, reflective of the real situation?
- Did the United States base its post-Andijan policy toward Uzbekistan on a correct assessment of genuine U.S. regional interests? Does Washington know the real state of events in Uzbekistan, including Tashkent’s actual record in human rights and democracy and the prospects for democratization?

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- By losing U.S. influence in Uzbekistan to advance economic and political liberalization, what has instead been achieved?
- Can or should the United States attempt to resume positive engagement with Tashkent? If so, how should the United States restore a positive relationship with Uzbekistan?
- By the United States turning its back on Uzbekistan, has Washington advanced the strategic interests of Moscow and Beijing?

The Influence of the Western Media

The U.S. government's and media's initial responses to Andijan were relatively balanced and pragmatic, as they recognized “both sides” of a complex situation. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice labeled the actions taken by armed insurgents as inappropriate, expressing concern that among the freed prisoners were extremists, terrorists and criminals, as she called for both sides to practice restraint.

Within a day or two, however, the Western media and a number of interest groups launched an aggressive campaign to capitalize on the incident, calling for much tougher pressure on Tashkent.⁴³ Karimov's exaggerated negative reputation as a tough and brutal dictator, ripening in the West after more than 15 years of one-sided and very critical media coverage, helped forward the critics' goals almost immediately. As a result, many in the West quickly came to believe that Andijan was in fact a massacre and compared it to 1989's brutal suppression of peaceful, democratic demonstrations in Beijing's Tiananmen Square by the Chinese military. The fact that the initially peaceful demonstrations in Andijan turned violent because of the armed insurgents', not government's actions, had been successfully “forgotten.” When the Uzbek government responded to events, its seemingly excessive and indiscriminate suppression of the crowd, which included armed rebels who had already killed about a dozen police officers and soldiers, and taken dozens of hostages, increasingly came to be portrayed in an extremely one-sided way.

Goaded by radical lobby groups and an increasingly hostile media, most Western European governments began to criticize the Karimov regime's response to events in Andijan—a byproduct of more than a decade and a half of persistent demonizing of the Karimov regime by media and lobby groups. After wavering for a week or so, Washington joined the rising chorus of criticism, joining its allies in pressuring Tashkent by demanding an international investigation. In addition, the U.S. government was instrumental in bringing more than 400 Andijan refugees in Kyrgyzstan to Europe and the United States, despite serious allegations that some of them could have been involved in violence, crimes and terrorism in Andijan.

While Karimov was well aware prior to Andijan of Western governments' negative views of his administration and its policies, it is apparent that he initially expected a more balanced, pragmatic and nuanced reaction from the United States and Western Europe over Andijan. In light of previous attitudes, Karimov was apparently concerned about how objective an international investigation would be.

Prior to Andijan, Tashkent had already begun to slow the pace of democratic reforms, despite the fact that during 1994-2004 and particularly between 2000-2004, the Uzbek government had instituted cautious if limited steps toward broader political participation and liberalization.⁴⁴ Despite these hesitant reforms, radical advocates of democratization, human rights advocates and lobbyists, both in the West and among the Uzbek opposition, consistently criticized the pace of change as non-existent, too slow, “window dressing” or “cosmetic,” locking Uzbekistan into a “no-win” public relations campaign.

The Color Revolutions in 2003-2005 in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan doubtlessly convinced Karimov

and Uzbekistan's ruling elite that rapid democratization was a threat to their rule, leading them to reject both Western and domestic calls for reform in these areas. The Uzbek leadership ultimately concluded that allowing Western governments and NGOs to support and openly encourage local oppositionists under the mantle of promoting human rights and civil society was a direct threat to both their rule and existing political system.

In the aftermath of the Andijan tragedy these suspicions deepened with Western responses, and Karimov's government stoutly resisted Western calls for an international investigation, arguing that to agree would undermine national sovereignty, while reminding critics that his government had a functioning political system and was hardly a "failed" or "failing" state.

Given such pressures Karimov adopted a siege mentality and tried to have it both ways. While avoiding sharing important details of how troops responded in Andijan by selectively releasing information, Tashkent at the same time apparently concluded that an international investigation would not be impartial or draw balanced and accurate conclusions. Karimov's suspicions were based on two previous Western international investigations of two Uzbek prisoners who were allegedly tortured to death. The two incidents were initially widely reported in the West, but not the eventual conclusions of internationally recognized independent experts who claimed that there was no evidence to support the claims. In the 2004 case of Andrei Shelkovenko, an international team, including Ottawa's provincial government's top forensic specialist Michael Pollanen and former U.S. Ambassador Victor Jackovitch, invited by the U.S.-funded Freedom House, was given full access to the Ministry of Internal Affairs reports and eventually concluded that Shelkovenko had died from hanging himself, as Tashkent had maintained.⁴⁵ While Human Rights Watch then acknowledged its error in portraying Shelkovenko as a victim of Uzbek governmental abuse, the damage was done.⁴⁶ A subsequent investigation sponsored by Freedom House into the case of Samandar Umarov, who died in Uzbek custody on January 2, 2005, reached a similar conclusion.⁴⁷ Despite these retractions by prominent international experts, the refutations were as widely ignored by the Western media and anti-Karimov groups as the initial charges were publicized.

Faced with rising Western criticism after Andijan, on May 25 Karimov went to Beijing for an official visit; both governments portrayed the visit as scheduled before the uprising. Both Beijing and Moscow supported Karimov's assertion that his government's response to Andijan was a legitimate and appropriate reaction to an armed Islamic terrorist uprising.

China and Russia also supported Karimov in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). At a SCO summit on July 6, Karimov called for Washington and other non-SCO members to set a timetable to withdraw their troops from Central Asia who were supporting operations in Afghanistan—a pointed message to Washington and other Western capitals. At the time of the declaration, only Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan hosted foreign military bases of importance, mostly American, to support operations in Afghanistan. While the Kyrgyz government primarily wanted more compensation and political benefits for the lease of the U.S. base, Karimov clearly wanted to use the SCO as a forum to pressure Washington into softening its demands for an international investigation of the Andijan tragedy and broader human rights issues.

Tashkent's displeasure over Washington's stance was underlined on May 29, just two weeks after Andijan, when Senator and now Presidential candidate John McCain and fellow senators Lindsey Graham and John Sununu visited Tashkent. Neither Karimov nor any other high-ranking officials would meet with them. Even Sodik Safaev, former Uzbek Ambassador to Washington in 1996-2001, former Foreign Minister and currently Chairman of the Uzbek Senate Foreign Relations Committee would not receive the trio, who subsequently held a press conference at the U.S. embassy. Analysts believe that the decision not to greet the U.S. legislators was made by Karimov himself, despite Safaev's formerly excellent relations in Washington.

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However, worse was to follow, as Washington subsequently sent a high level delegation of government officials to Tashkent to negotiate the frayed state of bilateral relations and continued American access to the K-2 air base. Though details of their talks have not been made public, the U.S. negotiators apparently did not soften Washington's rhetoric regarding Andijan and its demand for an international investigation, at least publicly. In the absence of any compromise from either side, on July 29 Karimov exercised Uzbekistan's rights under the 2001 bilateral military agreement and stated that the Pentagon must evacuate K-2 within six months. Recognizing the inevitable, American troops left Uzbekistan in November 2005 ahead of schedule and transferred a number of assets to Kyrgyzstan's Manas air base, its sole remaining facility in Central Asia north of Afghanistan.

After leaving K-2, Washington has continued to criticize Tashkent on human rights issues and insist on an international investigation of Andijan. Applying fiscal pressure, U.S. aid to Uzbekistan, which was always much less than aid provided to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, has been repeatedly cut and is almost non-existent at present. Furthermore, many Washington critics of Uzbekistan are pressing for further steps, including imposing sanctions.

Why Karimov Rejected U.S. and Western Pressure - Psychological and Political Considerations

Karimov has always resisted pressure, whether domestic or foreign, even from 1989 to 1991 when he ruled Uzbekistan as a republic within the USSR. Karimov had always been circumspect of "democracy and human rights" issues in his relationship with Washington, even during the closest period of U.S.-Uzbek cooperation in 2001-2003. Karimov evidently believed that American support for democracy would help his political opposition to gain strength and limit his opportunities to prevent them from becoming a serious threat to his rule. Karimov's concerns were shared by most of his power base and Uzbekistan's ruling elite. After the September 11 attacks, Karimov became an enthusiastic and vocal supporter of Washington's war on terror. Karimov believed that Washington did not have any other realistic alternative to him and his control over Uzbekistan and intuitively understood the importance of Uzbekistan for American operations in Afghanistan and the global war on terrorism.

The March 2005 Tulip Revolution in neighboring Kyrgyzstan attracted Tashkent's close attention, particularly its undercurrent of violence, unlike the earlier regime changes in Georgia and Ukraine. All three revolutions ousted weak leaders who were already in the process of stepping down for their chosen successors. Politicians, who previously were close associates of the ousted leaders, were able to mobilize popular protests and lead opposition movements. Among the players in all three cases were an independent oppositionist media and civil society political interest groups underwritten with Western funding. A legal opposition with significant representation in the parliaments and divisions within the ruling elites, abetted by funding by affluent local business people, also promoted revolution.

Despite Kyrgyzstan's more than 15 years of relatively liberal politics, independent media and well-developed legislative institutions, unlike its regional neighbors, its March 2005 Revolution was not peaceful. Many specialists subsequently believe that the possibility of revolution in Uzbekistan, a country with a less open political system, would probably end quite violently.

Karimov certainly believed that the threats to his rule were real. Even prior to the upheavals in Tbilisi, Kiev and Bishkek, his government restricted the operations of American and other Western non-government organizations far more rigorously than Kyrgyzstan. Tashkent's limitations actually intensified after Akayev fled Kyrgyzstan. The underlying pressures finally exploded in Andijan, with its predictable and inevitable consequences.

While the initial Western media reports and Washington's response to Andijan were fairly balanced and accurate, within days the reporting and commentary on the tragedy had been successfully hijacked by anti-Karimov interest groups, an error compounded by the U.S. media's and policy community's arrogance and ignorance of Uzbekistan. They were all too willing to believe the already very negative reputation of Karimov and his regime, promoted for years by special interest groups.

The mounting virulence of the Western reaction to Andijan caught Karimov off-guard, as he evidently did not expect such a harsh reaction, believing instead that his allies in the war against terror and militant extremism would pursue a more balanced and pragmatic approach to the events in Andijan. The immediate result of the negativity surrounding Andijan was to drive the Karimov administration into a siege mentality, further tightening its control over the media, legislature, courts and sanctioned political parties, which even more than before hesitated to express disagreements with Karimov's policies, leaving Karimov instead listening to sycophants telling him just what he wanted to hear.

Karimov's reaction to the mounting Western criticism was to downgrade his relationship with Washington while building closer ties with China and Russia. In the last two years Karimov, the United States and Europe managed to keep the doors somewhat open for an eventual future normalization of relations as Tashkent has gradually resumed a more balanced foreign policy orientation. But the U.S. and European dialogue on "normalization" desperately needs to be intensified.

Policy Recommendations

Washington should launch its own investigation on what happened in Andijan, involving truly independent and unbiased experts with expertise on Uzbekistan. Such an investigation should have complete and unfettered access to all CIA and other U.S. agencies' materials on the tragedy, including satellite imagery. Washington should also design a package of proposals for Uzbekistan, including measures to stimulate economic growth and market reforms which could help to create an environment friendly to business, trade and investments.

The proposals should also involve American assistance to Uzbekistan's security forces, including the police, law enforcement officials and the military. Indeed, one of the shortcomings of the assistance to Uzbekistan was its focus on bilateral military relations instead of establishing ties to the Ministry of Interior. These forces have responsibility for domestic order and perhaps if they would have received some level of U.S. training in crowd-control, or received alternative training other than the customary Soviet-style of crowd-control techniques, then the outcome of Andijan might have been different. Nonetheless, aid should be designated for Uzbekistan's judiciary and legislature, with the ultimate goal of moving gradually toward the rule of law, fostering the emergence of a genuinely independent media and broadening the participation of civil society organizations, which would in turn lead to increased political participation, civil liberties, free elections and democracy.

Priority attention should be given to moderate, responsible, constructive and independent indigenous Uzbek groups. Up to now U.S. and European approaches have been dominated by efforts to promote civil society, democracy and human rights, which have focused on radical opposition groups; this clearly flawed policy should be changed. The invective rhetoric against the current regime in Uzbekistan has accomplished nothing.

There is much to be said for a more creative approach toward engagement with Uzbekistan. Programs should be developed that focus on training Uzbek government agencies and police forces to handle peaceful mass protests without inflicting casualties among innocent people even as security forces maintain order and combat crime and terrorism. Western efforts should be directed toward helping Tashkent distinguish between unarmed innocent protesters and armed insurgents and terrorists. Western peacekeeping efforts have a great deal to

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teach Tashkent about using non-fatal means to maintain public order in the face of protests even as the government wages an ideological battle for the hearts and minds of the people

Both the West and Uzbekistan are equally culpable in perpetuating the mythology about what actually happened in Andijan on that terrible day, two years ago. If Washington is truly committed to combating fundamentalist terrorism, it should release all of its intelligence on the events of that tragic day. Similarly, Tashkent should unveil all of its information, whether it supports its assertions or not, and both sides should allow the ultimate verdict to be rendered in the court of informed public opinion. To do any less is to dishonor the memory of those who died on that sultry day two years ago.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

AbduMannob Polat (Abdoumannob Kayum Poulatov) is an independent analyst and a consultant on conditions and developments in the former Soviet space, in particular in Uzbekistan and other parts of Central Asia, as well as U.S. relations with the region. He is the author of three book chapters and approximately 50 reports and articles published in the United States. His writings have been published by John Hopkins University and the Washington/Seattle Universities, Journal “Demokratizatsiya” of the American and Moscow State Universities, Center for Political and Strategic Studies (Center for Post-Soviet Studies), “Central Asia Monitor,” “Monitor” (of the Union of Councils), www.EurasiaNet.org, “Uncaptive Minds,” “Transitions-on-Line” and “Caspian Crossroads.” He has appeared on “Foreign Exchange with Fareed Zakaria” and his Q&A interview appeared in the Washington Times. Additionally, he has worked as a translator, translating from Uzbek/Russian into English and vice versa.

From 1988-1999, AbduMannob Polat was a founding member of the leadership for the first Uzbek movement for national revival and democracy known as “Birlik” (Unity). He served as the founding chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (1991-2001), the leading Uzbek human rights organization at that time. In 1993-2003, he directed the Central Asian Human Rights Information Network of the Union of Councils.

In June 1992, Polat left Uzbekistan. In December of the same year, after co-sponsoring and directing an international conference on human rights in Central Asia in Bishkek, he was abducted by Uzbek security forces. He was brought back to Uzbekistan, jailed and charged with “insulting the dignity and honor” of the Uzbek President. After nearly two months in three prisons, the Uzbek Supreme Court sentenced him to three years of imprisonment. Fortunately though, he was freed by the court according to general amnesty, most likely due to pressure from the United States and Western Europe.

In March 1993, Polat arrived in the United States. AbduMannob Polat speaks at various conferences, American universities and U.S. and international organizations, including hearings and briefings for the U.S. Congress, State Department and the UN.

ENDNOTES

¹ Caspian Sea Region, U.S. Department of Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/caspian.html>.

² The author has a videotape of this meeting shot by demonstrators.

³ “Vosstavshie zakreplyayutsya v Andizhanskom xokimiyate, na ix storone 3 BTR,” www.centrasia.ru, May 13, 2005.

⁴ The Uzbek government claims that Akrom Yuldashev organized the “Akramiya” group. Yuldashev left Hizb ut-Tahrir in the early 1990s and wrote a brochure named “Tymonga Yo’l” (Path to Faith). Many reporters and observers have claimed that there was no such organization. However, the correspondent for the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR) and www.Uznews.net, Matluba Azamatova, along with several other sources, reported that the group had been organized in mid 1990s. According to her, the group’s primary aim was to replace old ideas by creating new progressive programs to conduct economic reforms.

See: Matluba Azamatova, “4 tysiachi chelovek pikitiruiut zdanie suda v podderzhku akromiitsev,” <http://www.uznews.net/st190.htm>, May 11, 2005.

⁵ Sources vary on the exact number of protesters, estimating them from several up to about 100, during the first two months of protests, rising to hundreds – possibly to several thousand by May 12. Protest organizers supplied participants with food, soft drinks and wooden benches. “Uzbekistan: The Andijan Uprising,” International Crisis Group Briefing #38, May 25, 2005, p. 3.

⁶ Igor Rotar, “Uzbekistan: What is Known About Akramiya and the Uprising?” Forum 18 News Service, June 16, 2005.

⁷ Bukharbaeva was an IWPR reporter who witnessed the events in Andijan, writing about the scenes of panic when armored cars randomly opened fire on crowds of demonstrators. Galima Bukharbaeva, “Blood flows in Uzbek crackdown,” IWPR Reporting Central Asia No. 377, May 14, 2005. http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=244239&apc_state=henirca2005.

⁸ Azamatova, op. cit.

⁹ Matluba Azamatova, “Controversial Trial Triggered Uzbek Violence,” RCA No. 376, IWPR, May 13, 2005. http://www.iwpr.net/?p=rca&s=f&o=244245&apc_state=henirca2005.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Reuters, May 11, 2005. Zaynabitdinov has been in jail since June 2005, probably for his highly visible and significant role in reporting the trial of the 23 and defending them, but more importantly, in disseminating information about the Andijan tragedy, which greatly irritated the Uzbek government. At the time of drafting this report, he was serving a seven-year jail term.

¹² Reuters, May 11, 2005. See also: “Sotni Andizhancev organizovali piket v podderzhku ‘Akromistov,’” [www.centrasia.ru](http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1115817480), <http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1115817480>, May 11 2005.

Referring to Zainabitdinov, the Washington Post reported that, “Prosecutors called for lengthy prison sentences for all of the defendants, sparking a wave of anger across the city, according to Saidzhakhon Zainabitdinov, chairman of a local human rights group.” The Washington Post quoted Sainabitdinov as saying during a phone interview from Andijan, “The prosecutor’s speech caused these huge rallies” and “all the protests became more intense.” Peter Finn, “Uzbek Crowd Storms Prison In Anti-Government Protest - At Least 12 Killed In Day of Clashes,” Washington Post Foreign Service, May 14, 2005. This author believes that either Sainabitdinov changed his story after the 12-13 May events: on May 11, he reported the prosecutor’s request for reduced sentences for the 23 defendants; however, when interviewed by The Washington Post, he was quoted as saying something in almost the opposite direction (“Prosecutors called for lengthy prison sentences for all of the defendants, sparking a wave of anger across the city”), or Finn was unable accurately to present Sainabitdinov’s words, possibly due to confusion, language and cultural barriers or bad phone connection. Information that prosecutor requested the judge to hand down greatly reduced lesser sentences for the 23 defendants on trial is supported by opposition reports and correspondents for the IWPR, the BBC and several other media outlets. See Azamatova: “4 tisyachi...,” op. cit.

¹³ Azamatova, “4 tisyachi...,” op. cit.

When asked what specific criminal acts the defendants had carried out, chief prosecutor Ulughbek Bakirov was quoted as telling the court, “they have not yet committed any crimes—but they might commit them.” Azamatova, “Controversial...,” op. cit.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Professor Bakhtiyor Bobojonov, an Uzbek semi-independent expert on Islamic movements in Uzbekistan with a reputation for academic integrity, who works for the Uzbek Academy of Sciences, stated that months after the Andijan tragedy he was shown the judge’s ruling on the 23 defendants with lesser sentences than those initially requested by the prosecutor, prepared for announcement.

¹⁶ The London-based IWPR quoted one of the protesters, who claimed that on the night of May 12, authorities began arresting participants at the demonstrations, and that the uprising was in response to these arrests. “Sharif Shakirov, the brother of one of

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the accused, told me that right after the court hearings, officers of the National Security Service, SNB, started arresting people who had been outside the court. They even confiscated cars parked nearby that belonged to relatives of the defendants. The arrests continued through May 12, and that night people went to try to get their friends and family members out of detention. They started at the traffic police offices, and as numbers built up they moved towards a military unit based in the city, where they forced troops onto the defensive and seized Kalashnikovs. As the night went on, they went to the SNB building for Andijan region, where the newly-arrested people were being held.” Bukharbaeva, op.cit.

¹⁷ Rebel leader Sharif Shokirov told an IWPR reporter that on May 11-12, authorities arrested six protesters and confiscated several cars, and that when the people subsequently went to the traffic police, they did not succeed in freeing the seized vehicles, so instead they attacked the military garrison and jail.

¹⁸ “Uzbekistan: The Andijan Uprising,” International Crisis Group Briefing #38, May 25, 2005, p. 4.

¹⁹ The weak rule of law and rampant corruption in the police, prosecutorial and judiciary bodies, combined with the alleged use of torture, mean that many people in Uzbekistan can get arrested on slight grounds and are unlikely to receive a fair investigation or trial.

²⁰ Among the freed prisoners was convicted murderer Mikhail Sakhnov, who reportedly had killed three wives and was awaiting execution. After being freed, he promptly went home and killed his son Andrei, according to Aleksei Volosevich.

“Man’iak na svobode. Sredi osvobodivshiesya iz Andizhanskoi tiurny byl seriinyi ubiitsca,” May 18, 2005.

Dr. John C. K. Daly, “Events in Andijan anything but black and white,” ISN Security Watch, June 8, 2005.

²¹ Ed Vulliamy, “Death in Bobur Square,” The Guardian, September 13, 2005.

²² Bukharbaeva, op. cit.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Rotar, op. cit.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Rebel leader Kabul (Qobul) Parpiev was quoted as stating (in mid-June 2005 interview to opposition-minded reporter Shohida Yoqub (Shakhida Yakub): see http://www.uznews.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=156&Itemid=32) that about 50 individuals had been taken hostage by protesters. This interview was published on September 13, 2006 at www.UzNews.net, (“Kto takoi Kabul Parpiev: ‘Tyomnaya Losh’adka’ Andijanskix Sobytij,” Galima Bukharbaeva’s article with Russian translation of Kabul Parpiev’s interview). See reports in Uzbek: <http://www.ozodlik.org/domesticreports/society/uz/2005/05/9C84C1A7-2024-4C4C-B049-3369BC4FDD33.asp>.

Also Vulliamy, who reported, “As they advanced, some members of the crowd took six policemen hostage to use as human shields.”

²⁷ See reports in Uzbek, op. cit.

Galima Bukharbaeva, “Proshel mesiat s 13 maya – dnia tragicheskikh sobytii v Andizjane” IWPR, June 13 2005.

²⁸ Aleksei Volosevich, “Rasstrelianyi Andizhan. Istoriia iz goroda, perezhivshogo tragediiu 13 maya,” <http://news.ferghana.ru/detail.php?id=3800&mode=news>, June 8, 2005

²⁹ The chairman of the Andijan chapter of the International Society for Human Rights and Uzbekistan’s Committee for Protecting Personal Rights.

³⁰ Daly, op. cit.

³¹ Muzaffarmirzo Iskhozov, “Miatezh, vosstanie, bunt? Chto ia videl v Andizhane svoimi glazami,” <http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1117094160>, May 26, 2005.

M. Zakhidov, “Andizhanskii miatezhniki rasstreliali Artikali Rakhmatova,” <http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1117094160>, May 20, 2005.

Anderi Kudriashov, “V Andizhane miatezhniki ubili pravozashchitnika Artikali Rakhmatova,” <http://centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1116593040>, May 20, 2005.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Vooruzhennye ‘akramisty’ zaxvatili gorod v Uzbekistane i vypustili iz tyur’m tyssyachi zakliuchennykh” <http://www.newsru.com/arch/world/13may2005/uzb.html>, May 13, 2005.

³⁴ According to Parpiev, Almatov first told him that he would try to get Yuldashev released, but in a subsequent phone call the minister took a tougher line, saying the judges in the case had refused the request, and that “the authorities will mount an assault on the rebels and take the city by force.” The minister also commented in another report that meeting the demands of armed rebels would mean “an invitation for future armed insurgencies.”

“Uzbek Troops Fire on Thousands at Andijan Rally, by IWPR staff in Uzbekistan,” RCA No. 376, May 13, 2005.

³⁵ Nick Paton Walsh, “Uzbekistan on the brink as clashes spread,” The Observer, May 15, 2005.

³⁶ Dr. Shirin Akiner, “Violence in Andijan, May 13, 2005: Independent Assessment,” A Silk Road Paper, Central Asia - Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, School of Advanced International Studies, The John Hopkins University,

Washington, DC, July 2005.

See map of the Andijan's Bobur Square and surrounding areas in the Human Rights Watch Report on June 7, 2005 report (Index No.: D1705): "Bullets Were Falling Like Rain." http://hrw.org/reports/2005/uzbekistan0605/1.htm#_Toc105632739.

³⁷ See report at <http://www.paarmann.info/weblog/?p=15>.

³⁸ www.CEIP.org.

³⁹ In Uzbek, "Qurbonsiz g'alaba bo'lmaydi" (There will be no victory without sacrifices.) "Qurbon" in Uzbek, in this context, means specifically "human losses, victims."

⁴⁰ Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Uzbekistan: A Bloody Mix of Social Unrest and a Power Struggle?" RFE/RL May 11, 2006.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ This campaign never stopped, even during the strategic alliance between the United States and Uzbekistan in 2001-2003. However, the Andijan tragedy had been "successfully" used by anti-Karimov lobby to further discredit the already demonized Uzbek government.

⁴⁴ John C. K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor and S. Frederick Starr, "Anatomy of a Crisis: U.S. – Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005," A Silk Road Paper, Central Asia - Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, School of Advanced International Studies, The John Hopkins University, Washington, DC, February 2006.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch wrote to Uzbek Prosecutor General on January 7, 2005 that it "recognizes that the government of Uzbekistan has recently taken important steps to develop an independent mechanism to investigate deaths in custody and grave human rights abuses, and that independent observers were allowed to observe the investigations into the custodial deaths of Andrei Shelkovenko and Ilkhom Umarov (the 'Anresay case') in 2004." (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/02/04/uzbeki10133.htm>, posted on HRW website on 02/04/05). While Human Rights Watch acknowledged "its error in attributing the cause of Andrei Shelkovenko's death to torture after a team of international experts found that Shelkovenko, arrested by Uzbek police on April 23, died as a result of hanging" and Rachel Denber, groups then Acting Executive Director for Europe and Central Asia Division, said "Uzbekistan took a significant step in allowing independent experts to examine the body. This is a precedent that should be extended to other cases where torture and ill-treatment have been alleged" in June 1, 2004 statement (<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2004/06/01/uzbeki8679.htm>), the advocacy group continued insisted lecturing what Uzbek and US and other governments, international organizations should do, without focusing also on how to reduce number of its own errors and how to provide more accurate and more credible reporting and assessment.

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch Statement on the Death of Andrei Shelkovenko, June 1, 2004.

⁴⁷ RFE/RL, January 18, 2005.