

Democracy and Statebuilding in Central Asia: Challenges for U.S. Policy-Makers

MARTHA BRILL OLCOTT *

With the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, United States policy-makers suddenly found themselves dealing with the leaders of twelve different states, rather than with just one, a state of affairs which the Bush administration accepted rather grudgingly. U.S.-Soviet relations had steadily improved during the Gorbachev years, and by the time of the USSR's dissolution, the two states had already moved from confrontation to cooperation. This relationship even showed some signs of developing into an alliance.

The demise of the USSR brought with it Gorbachev's dismissal, and substituted for him twelve largely unknown new heads of state. All of these states have obviously not been created equal. Certainly the post-USSR Bush-Baker policy was to see good relations with Russia as a central goal of U.S. foreign policy, and the Clinton team seems to have embraced this premise with even greater enthusiasm. Relations with the other nuclear states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are our second priority. U.S. leaders, however, have been cautious to pursue the advancement of U.S. interests in these and other Soviet successor states with an eye to retaining good, and ever improving, relations with Boris Yeltsin's Russia.

The Russian leadership too, has made its preferences obvious. President Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev publicly leave no doubt that they believe Russia has special rights and privileges throughout the geopolitical space of the former USSR—what they term the “near abroad.” The message to U.S. policy-makers is clear: if U.S. policies toward the Soviet successor states is not mindful of Russia's geopolitical interests, then American-Russian relations will surely suffer.

Meanwhile, the Yeltsin group has taken into consideration the sensibilities of U.S. policy-makers. Aware of America's commitment to the promotion of democratic reform and the transition to a market as the cornerstone of our policies toward Russia and all of the Soviet successor states, Russian leaders have consistently argued that the most effective instrument for strengthening democracy in any of the Soviet successor states is to strengthen democracy in Russia itself. Then, they claim, Russian democracy will serve as a catalyst for the

* Martha Brill Olcott is professor of political science at Colgate University and senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia. This article is based on research funded by the United States Institute of Peace. It was written before Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan left the ruble zone.

further democratization of the periphery. Moreover, the converse is also argued: the future of Russian democracy will be compromised if the United States pursues a fully independent policy in the region. A policy that would sever the periphery too quickly or too completely from Russia would strengthen the position of hard-line nationalists.

Even without Russia's advice, U.S. policy-makers have had little enthusiasm for developing separate foreign policies toward each of the newly independent states. Moscow is the center of the Eurasian land mass that Russia now dominates and the USSR dominated before it. America's priorities lay with promoting good relations with the rulers of the region, once these men seemed willing to play by the Western leaders' unstated terms of international engagement. For example, to assist Gorbachev to fend off internal pressure, the

"It would be hard to argue that . . . events in Central Asia are of direct strategic interest to the United States."

U.S. political establishment in bipartisan actions abandoned a forty-year commitment to Baltic independence by refusing to recognize the secessionist Baltic states prior to the USSR's formal diplomatic recognition of their existence. U.S. leaders showed even more caution about

championing the independence claims of other USSR nationalities, including politically important U.S. diaspora communities like the Armenians and Ukrainians.

Prior to independence, meanwhile, Central Asia posed no dilemmas for U.S. leaders, as even pro-reform leaders like Kyrgyzstan's Askar Akayev—who made a strong and positive impression on U.S. leaders—had no interest in the dismemberment of the USSR. Meanwhile, U.S. interest in Kazakhstan—largely centered around Chevron's plans to develop the Tengiz oil field—was fully in line with the priorities of the USSR's own ministries.

The situation obviously changed with the formal dissolution of the USSR. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan were awarded all the formal appurtenances of a sovereign independent existence, ranging from the most critical, such as membership in the United Nations and other international bodies, to the more minor, such as state airlines and new stamps. It must honestly be stated, however, that U.S. policy-makers have given little attention to these new nations. This should not be surprising, for this lack of world attention is not entirely undeserved. It would be hard to argue that—the nuclear question aside—events in Central Asia are of direct strategic interest to the United States. Nonetheless, over the past two years, each of five Central Asian states has been of occasional concern to U.S. political leaders: Kyrgyzstan for its “democratic revolution”; Tajikistan for its civil war; Uzbekistan for its abuses of human rights; Turkmenistan for its wealth-based “go-it-alone”

strategy; and, of course, Kazakhstan for its “nuclear arsenal.”

Russian leaders claim that the region is of strategic importance, often without spelling out why. In some instances, Russian interest is obvious, such as in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is nearly forty percent Russian, shares an over 3000 mile long border with Russia, and has part of the CIS strategic arsenal. As to the other countries, Russia's motivations are less clear. There is veiled, and sometimes not so veiled, talk of Islamic threats flowing over Central Asia's borders into Russia, and also fears about the fate of the smaller Russian minorities in each of the remaining countries.

Until now, however, American leaders have not clearly stated the U.S. national interest in the region, nor the criteria by which to judge the validity of Russia's interests. In part this demands an assessment of the likelihood of democratic institutions emerging in Central Asia. At the same time, meanwhile, we must also ask ourselves whether a democratic Russia will pursue a democratic policy in Central Asia. Even a demo-

“Even a democratic Russia may prefer to recreate relations of economic and military dependency with the new Central Asian states rather than to encourage these states to develop in accordance with their own long-term economic and political interests.”

cratic Russia may prefer to recreate relations of economic and military dependency with the new Central Asian states rather than to encourage these states to develop in accordance with their own long-term economic and political interests. Without answers to these questions it is impossible to know whether the United States can afford to pursue a policy toward Central Asia that is shaped by Russia's interests as well as our own.

Democracy-Building in Central Asia

The five Central Asian states are subject to the same stresses currently at work in Russia: the enduring battles between presidents and parliaments; the struggles for local autonomy; separatist movements; inter-ethnic conflicts; and the jostling between advocates of democracy and defenders of national or religious privilege. None of the states have all of these problems, but each has some of them, although the risks of instability are greater in some regions than in others.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is still a “nuclear” state, although public discussions on the supervision of the former USSR's strategic nuclear forces throw serious doubt on the ability of President Nursultan Nazarbayev or Kazakhstan's leadership to control or deploy the weapon systems on Kazakhstan's soil. By general agreement and by most criteria, meanwhile, Kazakhstan is also potentially

Central Asia's wealthiest state. Therefore, Kazakhstan has received the greatest attention from U.S. political officials and businessmen. This latter group is further encouraged by Nazarbayev's public stance, which is as supportive of capitalism and private investment as that of the Yeltsin economic reform team. In fact, Kazakhstan has been quicker to legislate many of the foreign investment guarantees which Western business requires than Russia has, and the outlook for short-run stability in Kazakhstan seems far better than it does in Russia.

“Kazakhstan has been quicker to legislate many of the foreign investment guarantees which Western business requires than Russia has, and the outlook for short-run stability in Kazakhstan seems far better than it does in Russia.”

The long-term political viability of the state, however, is much more uncertain. Unlike Boris Yeltsin, President Nazarbayev has not cultivated an image of himself as a democratic figure. Elected by a Soviet-style 98 percent majority in a one-man election, Nazarbayev has chosen instead to foster the image that he is a world-class and reform-minded leader, and the one man who

can keep an ethnically bifurcated state from splitting. Although Nazarbayev remains his country's most popular politician, his popularity is eroding among both Russians and Kazakhs. While the legislature poses little open challenge to Nazarbayev's authority, periodic sniping from this mostly undemocratically elected body has become common. Yet, for the moment, Nazarbayev is able to gain his way with this legislature through the threat of dissolution and early elections.

The poor economic situation has, of course, fueled criticism of Nazarbayev's leadership and economic policies. That is not surprising, because even in Kazakhstan foreign investment has not been rapid enough or large enough to prevent an economic decline. According to *Kommersant*, during 1992 the wholesale price index in Kazakhstan increased by 2400 percent, while production fell more than 15 percent. Kazakh nationalists complain that their people have suffered more from inflation than have the country's ethnic Russians and that they lack the capital to take advantage of the new economic opportunities. The Russians, in turn, complain that the Kazakhs are serving as a brake on reforms, and that the reforms will bring suffering disproportionately to a displaced *Russian* industrial workforce.

Kazakhstan also lacks a consensus on how independent the state should be. Ethnic Russians in general, and those from the industrial north in particular, are very supportive of Nazarbayev's decision to enter into a new ruble zone. The Kazakh nationalists, meanwhile, claim that this decision marks the end of Kazakhstan as a sovereign state. As the two national communities draw further apart, the Nazarbayev government fears that political parties will form which

mirror the major ethnic faultlines running through society. To Nazarbayev, political parties mean political opposition, so he is likely to continue to make it difficult for non-governmental groups, and even more so, anti-government groups, to grow from being political movements to become state-wide political parties. This has certainly been the case since the adoption of the state's new constitution in early 1993. Since then, previously registered political groups constituted along ethnic lines (like the Kazakh nationalist groups Azat and Zheltoksan and the Russian groups Yedinstvo and Democratic Progress) have found it all but impossible to obtain re-registration.

For all his recent growth and maturation as a political figure, Nazarbayev remains fearful of any political movement which he or people loyal to him do not control.

“... the pace of democratization in Kazakhstan depends upon the will of one man.”

Kazakh and Russian nationalist groups are able to participate in the state's political life, but on a highly restricted basis—for all intents and purposes at the behest of the president. Kazakhstan's new constitution does provide for the protection of its citizen's basic civil rights, and it lays out the rudiments of a pluralistic system with a partial separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. It is understood throughout the state, however, that the pace of democratization in Kazakhstan depends upon the will of one man.

Nazarbayev is determinedly controlling the “transition to democracy.” He meets periodically with Kazakhstan's various “opposition” leaders, in an effort to give them a sense of personal involvement and to insure that they know what behavior is expected of them. He also hopes that the newly organized “Unity and Progress” political movement which he heads will obviate the need for strong political parties, and so allow safe stage-management of Kazakhstan's first free elections for national and local parliaments. These are currently scheduled for late 1994.

It is far from clear what Nazarbayev will do if he perceives impending defeat. The political climate in Russia will obviously be of great influence here. Kazakhstan's press and media are far more open than they were in the late 1980s, but they remain far less democratic than either the central Russian press or that in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. Reporters and television personalities are expected to “demonstrate respect” for their nation's leader, although Nazarbayev's need for public praise is satisfied far more easily than are that of Uzbekistan's Karimov or of Turkmenistan's Niyazov. Constantly reminded of the Kolbin government's bloody overreaction to anti-government demonstrations in December 1986, Nazarbayev has been extremely reluctant to engage in public displays of force. His record of peaceful toleration of public protest is unsurpassed in the region, because while Akayev has been as tolerant, the Kyrgyz president has not had to

endure attacks as frequent or as fundamental as those made upon Nazarbayev.

In the months to come, the Nazarbayev regime may find its tolerance increasingly tested. In particular, trouble may occur in provincial cities, where some predict that unemployment will increase tenfold. Moreover, somewhere down the line the regime must begin responding to the grievances of the Russian population, which constitutes nearly 40 percent of the nation, but accounts for only about 20 percent of appointed senior government officials. The language issue is also building toward a confrontation. More than anywhere else in Central Asia, the Russians of Kazakhstan believe that the need to learn the local language is an abuse of their civil rights.

Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is the other Central Asian state in which Russians make up a major political constituency and where they fear the potential abuse of their civil rights. Russians comprise just under a quarter of the population. Here, as in Kazakhstan, Russians consider their rights abused if they are denied the ability to use Russian on an equal basis with Kyrgyz in all spheres of political life. Under current laws Russian loses legal status by 1997.

“It is difficult to predict whether the beleaguered [Kyrgyz President Askar] Akayev will be able to preserve indefinitely his commitment to democratic institution-building.”

Initially, Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev was far more solicitous of his Russian minority than was his neighbor to the north. In fact, Kyrgyz nationalists have sometimes been highly critical of their president, such as when he opened a Slavonic University in Bishkek to serve Central Asia's Russian population. As the

economic situation has worsened, however, President Akayev has become less solicitous of the local Russian population, many of whom are preparing to leave the state, and more solicitous of Kyrgyz public opinion.

Kyrgyz nationalists viewed the decision to open a Slavonic University as controversial. They lambasted Akayev in the state's two major independent newspapers,¹ *Asaba* and *Respublika*, for choosing to allocate limited educational resources for this project. In the end, a compromise of sorts was reached: in a Solomonic decision that truly pleased no one, the Slavonic University was opened, but it was allocated little money.

It is difficult to predict whether the beleaguered Akayev will be able to preserve indefinitely his commitment to democratic institution-building. Only war-torn Tajikistan had a more dismal record of economic performance in 1992 than Kyrgyzstan, and even performed better in some categories. In Kyrgyzstan production dropped by more than 25 percent and the wholesale price index increased by over 1800 percent. Without any form of energy save hydroelectric

power, Kyrgyzstan is vulnerable to pressure from its wealthier but less democratic neighbors.

The vulnerability of the state was once again made apparent when Kyrgyzstan introduced a national currency, the som, in May 1993, and Uzbekistan retaliated for the ensuing alleged economic hardships to its citizens by cutting off the flow of natural gas to Kyrgyzstan. The introduction of the som was expected to improve Kyrgyzstan's economy because it was accompanied by the release of international loan guarantees and credits. But in the short run Kyrgyzstan's "go-it-alone" strategy has led to a further drop in economic productivity and decline in the standard of living.

The state's deepening economic crisis has further exacerbated tensions between Kyrgyzstan's president and the legislature. For now, both remain pledged to avoid early parliamentary elections (scheduled now for 1995)

*Uzbek President Islam Karimov
"appears to be the most thin-
skinned of Central Asia's rulers."*

which will result in the introduction of a professional legislature about one-third the size of the current legislative body. The state's economic problems, however, could lead President Akayev to sacrifice some of Kyrgyzstan's democratic foundations, the very foundations which have led to his international political success. Signs of this already exist. In October 1993, the Kyrgyz government announced the implementation of 1991 legislation which subjects the press to official review. In the same month, President Akayev convened a special session of the legislature, the presidential apparatus, and the leaders of public organizations, and urged them to accept a year-long ban on public political activity, claiming that the state's economic crisis threatened to erode political stability.

Uzbekistan

All the Central Asian leaders yearn for stability, particularly since the example of Tajikistan has shown the deadly cost of instability. The leader most concerned with maintaining stability is Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov, who has repeatedly argued that the economic transition which Uzbekistan (and every other Central Asian state) is experiencing demands a strong hand.

Little evidence suggests that this economic transition will be a rapid one. In Uzbekistan, as in most of the rest of the region, economic recovery could prove to be as distant as was the radiant future of communism. Still, *Kommersant's* figures for Uzbekistan depict an economic situation far less bleak than those for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan—a decline in productivity of about 5 percent and a rise in the wholesale price index of 1400 percent. Recent price rises and the more general "inattention to detail" which Uzbekistan's economists demonstrate in offering data for publication suggests that the current situation may be less

rosy than the recently published 1992 statistics suggest.

Karimov also appears to be the most thin-skinned of Central Asia's rulers. Those who oppose him are rapidly elevated to the status of "enemy of the people." To Karimov this is proper; as things should be. As he explained in a March 1993 interview with Western correspondents, his current prosecution of Erk party leader and former presidential candidate Muhammad Salikh was justified by Salikh's refusal to work in, and for, the advancement of the Karimov administration.

It is hard to recall a time in Uzbekistan when what is permissible in political life was more narrowly defined than it is at present. Certainly not since Stalin's death have the limits of dissent been so tightly set, although Karimov seems to still lack the *capacity* to monitor the population as closely as Stalin's successors could. The will to control Uzbekistan's "hearts and minds" is clearly there though, with Karimov targeting Islamic activists, Islamic establishment figures, and secular democrats for direct control, and, if possible, political extermination.

Tajikistan

Prior to the September 1992 ouster of Tajikistan President Rakhmon Nabiyev, Karimov's harsh treatment of Uzbek opposition groups seemed to hamper his efforts to launch himself and Uzbekistan to the forefront of Central Asian politics. However, after the bloody struggle for control during the interim government (September-December 1992) in Tajikistan, Karimov's arguments seem to have become more persuasive to his fellow Central Asian leaders, and his personal stature is said to have risen at regional summits. Reared in the autocratic school of the Communist period, Central Asia's leaders have, to some extent, been swayed by Karimov's logic. In some cases they seem to have needed little or no convincing. This is certainly true of Emomali Rakhmonov, whose new government in Tajikistan is said to depend in part on Uzbek (as well as Russian) security guarantees. Karimov could, with some justice, depict himself as a democrat, at least by comparison to the way the Rakhmonov government has treated both the pro-secular and pro-Islamic "collaborators" of the interim government. While Karimov has publicly disassociated himself from the beatings or accidental deaths of opposition figures, Rakhmonov defends the need to "cleanse" Tajikistan of armed enemies, as well as his right to define the criteria for applying the term "enemy."

Turkmenistan

Karimov's style is also not alien to Turkmenistan's President Saparmurad Niyazov. Niyazov, however, would likely argue that the popularity of his presidential rule and his personification of Turkmen independence make "real" opposition in his state impossible. Niyazov seems as comfortable with his cult of personality as Stalin was; his recent order to replace the full-length Lenin in

downtown Ashgabat with a full-length commemoration of Niyazov on pilgrimage to Mecca is the latest and most dramatic in a long series of vivid examples. Niyazov too is intolerant of critics, showing them his displeasure so vigorously that it is clear that the risks of political opposition are real.

President of Central Asia's most traditional society, or *Turkmenbashi* (the head of the Turkmen), as he is now routinely described in the Turkmen press, Niyazov is also more confident than Karimov of his ability to coopt Islam. Thus, Niyazov has adorned his leadership with religious images as well as secular ones. He is also demonstratively "sharing" Turkmenistan's wealth with the people, by supplying electricity, gas, and water without charge to the state's households as of 1 January 1993, and promising free bread and state-funded vacations to come in 1994 and 1995. However, there is no clear proof that a dictatorially imposed order will provide more than very short-term stability, even in resource-rich Turkmenistan.

What Central Asia needs are long-term sources of stability, but there is no agreement on what these sources will be. The region's leaders hope that economic recovery will save them from their real or potential political difficulties. However, 1993 estimates of how quickly foreign investment and technical assistance will make even the wealthiest of these states fully solvent are sure to be less optimistic than those made the year before. Central Asian leaders now know that foreign investors must first be found, and their interest sustained through the long process of contract negotiation, and that only then will project infrastructure, road, or pipeline development begin. All of this, they now understand, means that it will be years before the vast flows of investment they had envisioned begin to come in on a regular basis.

This knowledge only compounds the problems of governing the states in this region. Central Asia's leaders are more nervous now than they were last year. As a result, each man's commitment to democratic values—for most of them already tenuous—has become weaker still. "Stabilizing" measures have now become clearly more attractive than "democratizing" measures in everyone's political repertory. As times have gotten tougher, meanwhile, it has become tempting to look once again to Moscow for solutions for both economic and security dilemmas. Thus, by the end of 1992 all of the Central Asian states had entered into bilateral security arrangements with Russia. Three of the five—Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan—had also entered into the new "ruble zone," turning over a great deal of economic discretionary authority to Russia in return for access to the ruble and free trade with Russia and other bloc members.

Russia and Democracy-Building in Central Asia

As events in the past year show, Russia is not an unbiased actor in Central Asia. Russians' views of Central Asia still resemble those of the colonizer toward the formerly colonized. Certainly, Russia has a strong incentive to involve itself in

Central Asian affairs, as nearly 12 million Russians still live in the region. Each state includes hundreds of thousands, and sometimes even millions, of “hostages of fortune,” people who came to live in Central Asia as part of the USSR, but now find themselves living in non-European nation-states.

The status of these people is a point of contention between Russia and the various new states in the region. Many of these people have no respect for the local culture or religion, are unwilling to learn the local language, and view the nationality whose homeland they now inhabit as lesser and even backwards people. These Russians arrived in what is understood to be a “civilizing” mission, and now find themselves labeled “second class.” Meanwhile, they are socially and often economically disadvantaged by their inability to speak the new official state language. Moreover, they face what they, and the Russian government, define as unacceptable choices: move back to Russia; live out their lives as “resident aliens”; or accept local citizenship with all the attendant consequences.

The Russian government argues that these choices are unfair ones. It asserts that the local Russians should be able to hold dual citizenship, and that the various Central Asian constitutions should be modified to award Russians the same language rights as the indigenous population. Anything less, they say is undemocratic. Furthermore, anything less will damage the local economy more than the Russian one, as it will drive out a population dear to Central Asia but unnecessary to the “mother” country.

These assertions create a real dilemma for Central Asia's leaders. They want Russia's economic assistance and security guarantees but they also realize that, once awakened, Central Asian nationalism is unlikely to accept Russian neocolonialism. Whatever the advantages brought by Russian, then Soviet rule, ordinary Central Asians are nonetheless distrustful of the Russians, and fear that their independence could be compromised by Russian “democrats” as well as by Russian nationalists.

United States Policy in the Region

The situation in Central Asia creates a confusing set of circumstances for U.S. leaders. All would like to see Central Asian independence linked to the democratization of the region and the development of free market economies. We should be realistic, however, about how lengthy and complex the process of building democracies is likely to be in these five states. Accordingly, we should take as our guidelines the experiences of Middle Eastern and South Asian states and not those of Western or Eastern Europe. None of the Central Asian states, save perhaps Kyrgyzstan, are on the verge of becoming Western-style democracies. In fact, pluralistic societies will come to the region only in another generation, if at all.

The best way we have to sponsor Central Asian development is to involve

ourselves in technological assistance and training programs in all five states, and work toward opening these societies to broader popular participation. Moreover, we should be wary of allowing our new Russian friends to guide us in our assessments, viewing their judgements as no less impartial than French sources would have been on developments in Algeria and Indochina. We should not assume Russian “democracy” will transfer to Central Asia any more readily than the British form of government did in India. Furthermore, we must be careful not to allow the Russians to help us define what democracy should be in Central Asia. Russians are a minority population in the region, and Kazakhstan excepted, generally a small minority. Moreover, they are used to exercising the rights of the ruling majority, to have their language, history, and culture dominate Central Asia's political and educational establishment. Now they are likely to have different—and by Russian criteria fewer—political rights than the Russians of Russia.

We should make our expectations clear to the Central Asians: Russians and all other minorities are to be treated equitably. But we should not, as the Russian democrats would, define “democracy” as providing them the *same* rights that they would have in Russia. Instead, in an effort to forestall massive emigration from the region, we should encourage the Russians to provide the children of Central Asian Russians with scholarships for study in Russia and help with job placement.

We must recognize that Kazakhstan is a special case, and try to work with Kazakhstan's government to help them develop a truly bi-national educational system and government. But given the conflicting nationalist sentiments that are growing in the Russian and Kazakh communities, we should not overestimate the likelihood of Kazakhstan developing into a stable civil society.

We must be sensitive to how much our understandings of the region are shaped by those of the Russians and the Russian press. Central Asians are particularly nervous about the Russian press' preoccupation with an Islamic “threat” in Central Asia. They see this as a strategy designed to frighten the Western powers away from direct contacts with the Central Asians. A more objective view reveals that Central Asia's current leaders come from non-religious backgrounds, and a few are professed atheists. Because the masses have close ties to their Islamic culture and are eager to have their children learn about their faith, those who are vying for power often use religious symbols in their struggle. The current fights, however, are over economic and political power, Tajikistan included. Even the leaders of Central Asia's “fundamentalist” mosques

“... we should be wary of allowing our new Russian friends to guide us in our assessments . . . we must be careful not to allow the Russians to help us define what democracy should be in Central Asia.”

and medressehs do not expect “Islamic states” to develop in the near or distant future.

Rising Islamic consciousness in Central Asia will obviously have implications for Russia's own Muslims—the Tatars, Bashkirs and various northern Caucasian peoples. But while this certainly creates a security dilemma for Russia's rulers, it need not create one for U.S. policy-makers. American foreign policy has never been “anti-Islamic,” nor should we pursue an “anti-Islamic” policy in Central Asia. While striving for democracy in the region is fine, talk of “secularism” makes the Central Asians nervous, as Communist ideology had aimed to create a secular society as well. Moreover, many Muslims argue that what we call secular is really “Western” or even “Christian.” After all, “civil societies” observe Sunday as a holiday, religious ones “Friday.”

Secular or quasi-secular societies can only be built through education and by example, not through pro-Western propaganda. In providing aid to the region we must strive for a delicate balance between trying to help new states set standards for their domestic policy, and being seen as “interventionist.” Moreover, given the current high level of political instability everywhere in the region, we should structure our aid to meet popular needs and not to support particular regimes. The future of Central Asia is an uncertain one, but there is no reason why U.S. relations with any of these states should fall victim to the fate of the individual politicians themselves.

Notes

¹ Readers of Central Asia's press will find Kyrgyzstan's newspapers extraordinary. The people running the independent newspapers feel free to express their opinions on all issues, and do so with a vehemence which would give most Western journalists pause. The government newspapers are also the most independent of any in the region. In Kyrgyzstan, nearly all forms of political opposition have been tolerated, although in deference to Uzbek and Chinese sensibilities, respectively, registration has been denied to an Uzbek language Islamic journal and to a Uigur separatist political movement.