

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND
EMERGING THREATS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED FIFTEENTH CONGRESS

SECOND SESSION

—————
JULY 18, 2018
—————

Serial No. 115–151
—————

Printed for the use of the Committee on Foreign Affairs



Available: <http://www.foreignaffairs.house.gov/>, <http://docs.house.gov/>,
or <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

—————
U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

30–801PDF

WASHINGTON : 2018

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EDWARD R. ROYCE, California, *Chairman*

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH, New Jersey
ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN, Florida
DANA ROHRABACHER, California
STEVE CHABOT, Ohio
JOE WILSON, South Carolina
MICHAEL T. McCAUL, Texas
TED POE, Texas
DARRELL E. ISSA, California
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
MO BROOKS, Alabama
PAUL COOK, California
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
RON DeSANTIS, Florida
MARK MEADOWS, North Carolina
TED S. YOHO, Florida
ADAM KINZINGER, Illinois
LEE M. ZELDIN, New York
DANIEL M. DONOVAN, Jr., New York
F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, Jr.,
Wisconsin
ANN WAGNER, Missouri
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida
FRANCIS ROONEY, Florida
BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
THOMAS A. GARRETT, Jr., Virginia
JOHN R. CURTIS, Utah

ELIOT L. ENGEL, New York
BRAD SHERMAN, California
GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
GERALD E. CONNOLLY, Virginia
THEODORE E. DEUTCH, Florida
KAREN BASS, California
WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID N. CICILLINE, Rhode Island
AMI BERA, California
LOIS FRANKEL, Florida
TULSI GABBARD, Hawaii
JOAQUIN CASTRO, Texas
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois
BRENDAN F. BOYLE, Pennsylvania
DINA TITUS, Nevada
NORMA J. TORRES, California
BRADLEY SCOTT SCHNEIDER, Illinois
THOMAS R. SUOZZI, New York
ADRIANO ESPAILLAT, New York
TED LIEU, California

AMY PORTER, *Chief of Staff* THOMAS SHEEHY, *Staff Director*
JASON STEINBAUM, *Democratic Staff Director*

SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS

DANA ROHRABACHER, California, *Chairman*

JOE WILSON, South Carolina
TED POE, Texas
TOM MARINO, Pennsylvania
F. JAMES SENSENBRENNER, Jr.,
Wisconsin
FRANCIS ROONEY, Florida
BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK, Pennsylvania
JOHN R. CURTIS, Utah

GREGORY W. MEEKS, New York
BRAD SHERMAN, California
ALBIO SIRES, New Jersey
WILLIAM R. KEATING, Massachusetts
DAVID N. CICILLINE, Rhode Island
ROBIN L. KELLY, Illinois

CONTENTS

	Page
WITNESSES	
S. Frederick Starr, Ph.D., chairman, Central Asia Caucasus Institute	4
Mr. Steve Swerdlow, researcher, Central Asia, Human Rights Watch	20
Ms. Spaska Gatzinska, associate director, Eurasia, National Endowment for Democracy	28
LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING	
S. Frederick Starr, Ph.D.: Prepared statement	7
Mr. Steve Swerdlow: Prepared statement	23
Ms. Spaska Gatzinska: Prepared statement	30
APPENDIX	
Hearing notice	52
Hearing minutes	53

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

WEDNESDAY, JULY 18, 2018

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE, EURASIA, AND EMERGING THREATS,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 3:00 p.m., in room 2172 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Dana Rohrabacher (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. The subcommittee is now not adjourned—we now are in session. So Mr. Meeks will have an opening statement. I will have an opening statement.

If we have any other colleagues join us they will have opening statements. So I will begin with mine.

So observers of Central Asia over the past 2 years have seen many reasons for optimism. The reformist-minded president—a reformist-minded president now leads Uzbekistan. The region's most populated country thus has, basically, an open-minded reformist new president.

Kazakhstan is completing a rotation on the United National Security Council and last year Kyrgyzstan held competitive elections which resulted in a peaceful transfer of political power.

Each of these are encouraging steps for the individual countries but also for the region. They suggest that we continue our positive engagement in collaborative partnership with those countries in the region.

I welcome our witnesses to this afternoon's hearing on current developments in Central Asia, which should help us determine the most effective foreign policy for the United States.

Problems with economic diversification, infrastructure, and rule of law clearly remain. But the trend lines provide much hope that Central Asia is becoming ever more interconnected, ever more prosperous and, yes, at peace with itself and with its neighbors.

With the continuation of the United States and NATO mission in Afghanistan, Central Asian governments have been supportive and expressed a willingness to play a positive role in security cooperation, to secure borders, to stop smugglers, and to fight terrorist organizations.

Through our bilateral and regional assistance programs, the U.S. Government is helping the governments of the five Central Asian states to increase security while expanding private enterprise, cross-border trade, and, of course, respect peaceful democratic dissent.

I welcome the news and I've welcomed the news earlier this year but especially what's been happening in that the Uzbek government has not accredited a Voice of America journalist for the first time ever. I find that a major step forward and we appreciate that.

We can hope that this is a trend which continues, of course, and, of course, it remains frustrating, however, that today Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty is only able to operate in three of the five Central Asian nations, and then usually only with difficulty.

While we applaud the increasing trade, economic contact, and economic exchanges as positive accomplishments, we must not turn a blind eye to politically motivated prosecutions, arbitrary detentions, corruption, and restrictions on freedom of expression. As we have our conversation about these issues today, it must be with the realization that we cannot take Central Asia for granted.

It is a region of secular governments and enterprising peoples. It is a pivot to the Eurasian land mass and a balancing point for the entire globe.

I would be or it would a historic setback for human kind if that part of the world were to be dominated by radical Islam or controlled through subterfuge or bribery by countries such as China.

It is better for the region and better for the West if Central Asia continues to make progress and remains on a pathway to openness, prosperity, and peace.

And before I yield to my ranking member, Mr. Meeks, let me just note that I have been fortunate enough to visit Central Asia and know them—know those people. They are to be welcoming and gracious people who I dearly respect.

While we may be separated and great geographical differences—they are literally on the other side of the world—I think there is a kinship between our peoples. We share a frontier spirit and sweeping landscapes that spread out to the horizon.

We can play a pivotal role in the development of Central Asia, for example, and different developments that they are doing and there are efforts—I'll give you an example—of the Central Asian Regional Electricity Market, which will help bring that region together and in better contact with the world and each other.

We have laid a foundation for cooperation through economic interaction and I hope through increased American attention that we will continue to make progress together and in a partnership and a friendship we will build a better world for them and for all of us.

Mr. Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is great that we are having this hearing today.

I think of often when I think of Central Asia I think of one great Member of Congress who was my predecessor who was the chair and then subcommittee—chair of the subcommittee and then ranking member, Eni Faleomavaega, who was—always told me that Central Asia did not get the attention that it should get and I couldn't agree with him more, now being the ranking member on this committee. It needs to get much more attention.

I've had the opportunity to travel to the region many times and when I leave I leave with the deepest appreciation for the beauty of the culture of each nation, the spirit of the people, and the mu-

tual interests and cooperation between the United States and our regional partners.

In many ways, although too often hidden from view on our national stage, Central Asia nations are global leaders with extensive international reach—economic, political, and security that extend way beyond the region.

So this hearing is extremely important. I want to thank our witnesses for agreeing to meet with us today and I reviewed your testimonies, and as a former board member, I know firsthand how important NED's work is and how substantial it is within Central Asia.

I especially appreciate NED being represented here this afternoon. There has been progress in the region on democracy-related issues.

But, of course, there are still many concerns and I am looking forward to hearing from our witnesses so that we might get a better understanding of the challenges and the opportunities that exist in Central Asia.

I know our witnesses will provide expert insight regarding human rights, security, and more. I hope we can also discuss efforts to diversify economically and geopolitically and how some see this diversification as a threat.

I am interested in hearing how effective Russia's Eurasian economic union has been at integrating Russian markets with Central Asia's and to what end? Military exercises with Russia also seem to be increasing within the region and I would welcome your thoughts on that.

Similarly, China's influence in the region is increasing at a steady clip. I'd like to know our witnesses' thoughts about the Belt and Road initiative and the impact China's investments will have in the near and short term, particularly with respect to debt increases in the region.

As mentioned, progress has indeed been made. Yet, democratization and the respect for human rights will require our attention for years to come in order to achieve further advancement of these ideals.

For those reasons, I am disappointed that the United States foreign assistance to the region has been cut by 35 percent in this fiscal year 2018's budget.

The United States has an important role to play in partnering with regional stakeholders. I hope we can get a better understanding of how U.S. assistance is helping.

Over the years, I've been keenly focused on the opportunities the United States has to increase bilateral cooperation in the region.

For example, I've been a strong supporter of Kazakhstan's economic development efforts, the push for WTO's accession, and authorization to extend PNTR status to Kazakhstan.

Both the U.S. and Kazakhstan has much to gain from greater economic engagement and ties, especially in non-oil energy business sectors such as high tech and aerospace as a way of creating jobs, accelerating economic growth, and security in both countries.

The same is true to varying degrees throughout all of Central Asia and it is clear to me that there are current partnerships that we should maintain and there are many opportunities ahead.

Engagement is the key, in my estimation. I thank you for being here and I look forward to hearing from the witnesses.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you, Mr. Meeks.

We have three witnesses today and let me just note that if you could try to keep your spoken testimony down to about 5 minutes and then we can have a dialogue, which is what the purpose is, but you can put anything else into the record. You can put your oral statement into the record.

So I will introduce the three of you and we will have the testimony. Dr. Fred Starr is the founding chairman of the Central Asia Caucus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program, a joint research center affiliated with American foreign policy—the American Foreign Policy Institute.

He has been a well-regarded expert in this region for a number of decades and he's past president of the Aspen Institute.

Next, we have Steve Swerdlow. He is a Central Asia researcher and he does that for the Human Rights Watch and he is an attorney with over 15 years of scholarly and human rights experience.

He has worked on the region and about the region for many years and I understand he has just returned from a working trip to Uzbekistan.

And I'll ask did you get to Samarkand while you were there? I've never been to Samarkand yet so I understand it's a beautiful, beautiful city.

Last, we have Spaska—let me make sure I get this right—Gatzinska—I got it right, thank you—associate director of the Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy and in that role she oversees programs in Central Asia and the broader Eurasian region.

So I'd like to welcome all of you and we may proceed with Dr. Starr.

**STATEMENT OF S. FREDERICK STARR, PH.D., CHAIRMAN,
CENTRAL ASIA CAUCASUS INSTITUTE**

Mr. STARR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to salute and add to your remarks and those of Mr. Meeks regarding engagement. Hat's off.

Now, why? Because we are at a moment today in which the opportunities in this region and the prospects for the region are at a higher pitch than they've been in 25 years. This is a remarkable moment.

There are a lot of causes for this. There are also factors holding it back, which I am sure we will hear about. However, among those causes, one that has earned particular attention, are the reform project going forward in Uzbekistan.

My colleagues will speak on several aspects of it but I want to just take note that our Central Asia Caucuses Institute undertook a year ago a systematic review of all the reforms going on there, trying simply to catalog them and follow their status, and we have covered economics, foreign relations, law, governance, religion, and so forth, and which will be in a forthcoming book entitled, "Uzbekistan's New Face."

Now, these—suffice it to say now that these are really fundamental reforms. We shouldn't expect all of them to be fully imple-

mented. It won't happen. It doesn't ever happen. We can expect resistance to some.

But this is as fundamental a reform program as taking place in any predominantly Muslim society on Earth today. It deserves our attention, deserves our support.

Now, let me just touch on a couple of aspects of it. First, on the foreign relations, this is transformative. They, basically, moved from, as everyone in the region is moving, from a period of exclusive focus on preserving their own sovereignty individually to one in which they are talking about the sovereignty and integrity of a region, and this is really a very fundamental change.

The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution recognizing this just a month ago. The United States supported it as, by the way, did China and Russia. We will see if they follow through. But it's an important shift.

In the area of governance, we are talking of very interesting developments with regard to empowering political parties and the Parliament itself to initiate legislation, not just to approve laws that are handing down from above—in the economics sphere, the convertibility of currency, the opening of contacts with the ability to invest abroad and receive investments from abroad. These and many other changes will bring about very basic shifts.

Now, with regard to religion, this is a Muslim majority society. What I want to stress is—and we will hear more about this—I am not going to dwell on the 23,000 people who've been taken off prescribed lists in that area. My colleagues will get into those questions.

I want, rather, to stress that this is a Muslim society with at the same time has a secular government and secular systems of laws and secular courts.

This is common throughout the region and it's a prime factor that should be at the front of our foreign policy. It's a very imperfect system but it's something we should be working with them to develop and perfect. It's something in which we have a common interest and common concerns.

Now, what should the U.S. do about all this? Let me simply say, first of all, I think we have to embrace the region as such. They really have shifted from, if you will, navel watching—each watching out for its own exclusive fate—to drawing—grasping hands on a regional basis.

This is really important. We cannot appear to be engaged in divide and conquer policies, handing out rewards and punishments to good guys and bad guys. We have to think regionally. We have not been used to doing that.

And the region itself has changed. When Kazakhstan proposed to Secretary of State Kerry to establish what became the C5+1 consultative format, we responded as they proposed. If that were to be proposed today, all residents of the region would favor including Afghanistan not as a neighbor of Central Asia but as part of the region. So I would add that.

Now, in addition to embracing the region and stressing the idea of these as secular states with secular systems of laws and courts and education in predominantly Muslim societies, secular in order

to protect religious freedom, not unlike our own system—that we want to work with them, it seems to be, to perfect that.

Then, finally, that we—there are problems aplenty and Mr. Meeks rightly touched on some of them. Of course there problems. The question that we have to decide—and I think it's fundamental—is are we going to work with them or on them.

Working on them, naming and shaming, hasn't worked—won't work. Working with them does work. I could give very specific examples if you'd like on how it has worked. I think that's the way to go for the future.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Starr follows:]

THE EMERGENCE OF CENTRAL ASIA, 2018, AND U.S. STRATEGY

Hearing before House Committee on Foreign Affairs

18July2018

S. Frederick Starr
Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
American Foreign Policy Council
starr@afpc.org

An Updated U.S. Strategy for Central Asia

During the first quarter century after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the five former Soviet republics of the USSR were isolated from each other and, to a considerable extent, from the world economy. Focused on preserving their sovereignty against perceived revanchist pressures from Russia, each went its own way, strengthening ties with China, the U.S., and Europe as a balance. In the process, many of the states adopted policies—or continued policies from Soviet times-- that limited the civic freedoms of their citizens, which they defended in terms of the preservation of sovereignty. The U.S. built solid relations with all five countries, but in every case qualified its relationship on the basis of that country's perceived record in the field of human rights. Moreover, it increasingly subordinated all five of these relationships to its project in Afghanistan. After 2012 it focused more on what it was *not* doing in Central Asia than what it *was* doing there.

Beginning in late 2017 the entire region entered a period of dynamic and fundamental change which is still gaining momentum today. The chief driver for this shift was the election of Shafkat Mirziyoyev as President of Uzbekistan following the death of his predecessor, Islam Karimov. Mirziyoyev, who had served as Prime Minister for thirteen years under Karimov, had prepared himself well. The economy, while not strong, was stable and free from crisis. Various reforms had already been quietly worked out and members of a talented younger generation of officials were eager to implement them.

Mirziyoyev unleashed a many-sided reform campaign, covering areas as diverse as law, human rights, elections, currency the economy, foreign relations, and religion. Never had any country in Central Asia (or in the entire Muslim world, for that matter) adopted such fundamental reforms as those which Uzbekistan introduced in 2017-2018.

In an effort to chronicle this many-sided effort, my colleagues at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute have enlisted a team of western experts to catalog the specific legislative initiatives, in law, human rights, finance, regional relations, governance, religion, and so forth. These reports, the most detailed in any language, are already available on line at silkroadstudies.org and within the next few weeks will be published as a book entitled Uzbekistan's New Face.

Uzbekistan's Surprising Reforms.

Rather than provide an inventory of these reforms, which time will not permit, let me list three initiatives under each of six headings:

- 1) Economy: fully convertible currency for first time in 25 years; freedom to launch private businesses and simplified registration; ability to seek investors abroad and to invest abroad.
- 2) Foreign relations: Prioritize relations with immediate neighbors, resolving all outstanding conflicts; opening borders and allowing visa-free trade with neighbors; regular joint meetings with presidents and senior officials; and joint projects with neighbors on matters of common interest.
- 3) Law: Create profession of defense attorneys meeting western standards; extensive revision of legal codes along western lines, including penal code; establishment of western (probably American) law school in Tashkent; opening of contact with major UN human rights bodies and other private agencies and the solicitation from them of suggestions for further reform.
- 4) Governance: Charge parliament with initiating laws and not merely passing laws drafted by President; call on local elective bodies, local citizenry, and the

press to report and correct malfeasance by public officials; and encourage Parties to forge links with like-minded parties abroad.

5) Religion: Release of religious dissidents and removal of thousands of names from proscribed list; establishment of Center for Enlightened Islam in Tashkent and of an Imam Bukhari Center in Bukhara; and educational support for "Enlightened Islam."._

Afghanistan Now Part of Central Asia

A conference on Afghanistan convened on March 28, 2017, in Tashkent and a Regional Cooperation Conference of Afghanistan held on 14-15 November in Ashgabat held special significance for the future of that country and of the region. At those meetings all five former Soviet states treated Afghanistan not merely as a *neighbor* of Central Asia but as an *integral part* of the region, with shared interests, understandings, culture, and history. Acknowledging this, the five states agreed to launch—in close collaboration with Kabul-- a many-sided effort to foster stable economic, social, and political development in Afghanistan. A wave of visits has already led to increased trade, investments, and educational projects, as well as to important initiatives in transport and energy. These amply deserve strong support from Washington.

The Balance Between Positive and Negative Trends Region-Wide

The reforms taking place in Uzbekistan are far from the only positive changes evident in Central Asia today. To be sure, negative trends persist in several countries, but in every case the country is engaged also in positive efforts that promise to strengthen the regional economy and open it to international forces of development. Several of these developments are of direct interest to the United States.

Kazakhstan is in the midst of a major effort to diversify its economy. Supported by a major new research university (Nazarbayev University), this effort is attracting investors and joint projects from East and West. A new Regional Financial Center has just been launched in Astana, providing international investors with access to adjudication under

British common law. And a rising general of young men and women with western educations and practical experience in the modern world are rapidly taking their place in both government and business at a time when rising prices on Kazakhstan's oil and gas has lifted the economy out of the doldrums.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan suffer from problems of governance, albeit for opposite reasons. Kyrgyzstan's effort at parliamentary rule has partially stalled under the burden of outside pressures and corruption. One-man rule continues to hamper Tajikistan which, like Kyrgyzstan, is buffeted by geopolitical pressures from Russia, China, and Afghanistan. Both countries are subject to pressures from foreign-sponsored Islamic extremists. Lacking energy resources, the economies of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are stagnant.

However, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are rich in potential hydroelectric power. A major new World Bank-funded project (CASA 1000) will transmit electricity from both countries to Afghanistan and thence to Pakistan, while regional and international investors are attracted to new power-generation projects in both countries, thanks to the more open economic environment created by the changes in Uzbekistan. Further, transport projects funded by China promise to open inaccessible regions of both countries to market-based international trade and to link them to continental corridors. In short, both countries face difficulties but are on the lip of changes that have the potential both to lift their economies and subject them more to market-based discipline.

Low world prices on gas, along with profligate expenditure on social projects, has hurt the economy of Turkmenistan. Its government has responded with near-panic, strengthening controls over the economy, which remains solidly in the hands of the state, and severely limiting the rights and freedoms of its citizens. Under severe and coordinated pressure from both Russia and Iran, Turkmenistan justifies these measures in terms of the preservation of sovereignty.

At the same time, Turkmenistan has used its own resources to build major new roads and railroads linking Afghanistan and the Caspian. Its modern new Caspian port at

Turkmenbashi is starting to function, linking Central Asia to Turkey and the West. The new corridor to the East and the real possibility of exporting its gas to Europe have the potential to open Turkmenistan to market-based development and lift the prevailing state of national emergency.

Even as it has pursued repressive policies at home, Turkmenistan has worked with Afghanistan, Pakistan and India to advance the long-stalled TAPI gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. This ambitious project could become a major source of stability within Afghanistan and an avenue of cooperation between India and Pakistan. Suffice it to say that both President Ghani and the Taliban support it, as do Pakistan and India. And for Turkmenistan itself, the close involvement with major economies that the pipeline would create would compel certain needed reforms.

When the U.S. government failed to offer strong support in 2014, American oil majors dropped out, leaving the Turkmen on their own. With help from the Asia Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and various national governments the project is now moving forward. It is not too late for the U.S. to reclaim an interest in this strategic project, which meshes with several key American interests in the region. If it goes forward without U.S. help, Washington will have handed China and Russia decisive voices in Kabul, after sacrificing thousands of lives and spending a trillion dollars in that country.

Summing up, the situation across Central Asia has changed dramatically during the past year, with further changes to be expected in the coming period. Most of these major changes are fundamental and positive. But uncertainties in Afghanistan, a looming leadership transition in Kazakhstan, economic woes in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan's difficulty in finding a second purchaser for its ample gas resources, all thwart positive developments in the region. And all lend support to the more regressive tendencies that are still felt there.

Seven Elements of a New United States Approach to the Region.

Against this background, what should be the U.S.'s strategy for dealing with this dynamic situation? The challenge for the US (and for the West generally) is to be cognizant of the negative trends in the region yet at the same time to recognize and support the many positive trends evident there as the best engines for advancing constructive developments that serve US interests.

The following recommendations for US and western policy are drawn from a book, The Long Game on the Silk Road, which my colleague Svante Cornell and I have just published. Allow me to reduce these in the form of seven main points:

1) First, embrace the region. The most significant development of recent decades has been the reemergence of Central Asia as a cultural, geopolitical, and economic zone. Its constituent countries have far more in common with each other than ASEAN countries. They have now actively embraced a new *regionalism* which they are asking the world community (and especially major powers) to recognize and respect. US policy should be framed, first, in terms of Central Asia as a region and then adjusted to the specifics of each country, never losing track of the whole.

In pursuing a regional policy, the US should soberly recognize problems but in each case seek solutions. Its task is to solve problems rather than to hand out rewards and punishments for what it considers good or bad behavior. Stated differently, the US should cease practicing its own version of Russia's "divide and conquer" policy.

2) Second, the US should follow the lead of Central Asian countries themselves and of Afghanistan itself and henceforth consider Afghanistan as fully a part of the Central Asia region. An immediate first step in this direction will be to transform Washington's existing "C5 Plus 1" initiative into a "C6 Plus 1."

- 3) The first concern of all Central Asian countries is to protect their national sovereignty and security. If either fails, this vital region, surrounded by nuclear powers and contested by Russia, China, and the West, will immediately become a source of great-power contention and strife. Better for Central Asia's security to be built from within than without. The U.S. must *begin* its negotiations with regional states and any new regional entity by acknowledging the importance of security and indicating that it will henceforth consider this a central element in its overall regional policy and not merely one isolated consideration among many.
- 4) Security inevitably involves a military component, but the best means of fostering and guaranteeing it is to develop vital market economies based on modern techniques and skills. A major objective of US policy should be to concentrate equally on the national and regional levels in order to remove impediments to their development. This will require clarity and frankness on issues involving investment and trade.
- 5) All of the above involve issues that one or both sides consider highly sensitive. For the US, human rights concerns have often played an outside role in policy, while national security and fear of centrifugal forces has played a similar role in the thinking of Central Asians. These are realities, and we are not proposing that they should, or can, be changed. Rather, we propose adopting new ground rules for pursuing them. Hectoring, scoldings, and shaming, by the U.S. have not worked, any more than have the Central Asians' tendency to cut programs and walk away. Henceforth, the U.S. should adopt the firm policy with respect to Central Asian countries to *work* with rather than *on* them, and to seek joint solutions to identified and recognized problems.
- 6) Sixth, U.S. relations with the individual countries of Central Asia, including Afghanistan, are not conducted in a vacuum, and nor will its future relations with the region as a whole. Other major powers, including China, Russia, Europe,

India, Japan, Korea, etc. are all similarly engaged and will take note of a new US strategy.

It is not the job of the U.S. to lecture other major countries on how they should conduct their relations with the region. But it is important to point to all that the U.S. intends to respect the full sovereignty and self-determination of all six Central Asian states and that it expects other powers to do the same.

Such an approach best promotes the security of the region and hence advances the stated interests of other powers in peace a security there. The US seeks to promote the security of Central Asian countries by strengthening their internal capacities and their capacities as a group rather than by subordinating either of them to some externally imposed order. In other words, the U.S. is prepared to practice a strategy of carefully delineated self-restraint and expects other powers to do the same. This could lead to open discussions among the powers, but these should not take the form of negotiating over the heads of the Central Asians themselves.

In advancing this proposal, we note that it is fully in accord with UN Resolution No.65 of 18 June, 2018, "Strengthening Regional and International Cooperation to Ensure Peace, Stability, and Sustainable Development in the Central Asian Region." Fifty-five countries, including the U.S., China, Europe, and Russia, co-sponsored the resolution, which called for the development of regional institutions in the areas of security, economic development, water management, and cultural areas.

7) For this new strategy to succeed, "inter-agency" process between the departments of State, Defense, and Commerce must be activated and strengthened. For a quarter century U.S. policy towards Central Asian countries has been parceled out subordinate officials in State Defense, and Commerce, who rarely, if ever coordinate their programs for the greater good. This glaring problem causes our regional partners to conclude they are negotiating with at least three separate countries. The strategy proposed here, which is put forward in direct response to the changing realities in Central Asia and

Afghanistan, cannot be effectively implemented if the separate agencies of the U.S. government that implement it fail to coordinate their efforts. "Interagency processes must therefore be regularized and greatly strengthened.

Are the Positive Trends Real? Will They Continue?

A skeptic, reading the above, may be tempted to point out that the new currents in Central Asia and the emergence of Central Asia as a distinct region with its own consultative structures depends heavily on the success of the reform program launched in Uzbekistan during 2017. It is true that several early changes instituted by President Mirziyoyev, including making the currency exchangeable and the opening of borders with neighbors, had an immediate and significant impact throughout the region. Many others, however, are more statements of intention than accomplished facts. Like many Uzbeks themselves, Uzbekistan's neighbors are watching with interest to see which of the countless reform measures are successfully implemented. Thus, it is fair to say that the biggest and most positive regional impact of the Uzbek reforms has yet to be felt.

What then, are Mirziyoyev's chances of success? Our skeptic might point to habits formed during centuries of rule by retrograde local khanates followed by tsarist and then Soviet rule, not to mention the repressive policies of the first quarter century following the collapse of the USSR. Can one expect habits to change overnight? Against this negative prognostication, one might note that the current reforms are being instituted not to stave off imminent collapse but from a basis of relative strength and self-confidence. Nor were the reforms conjured up overnight: we now know that many had been carefully prepared over many years prior to Mirziyoyev's election as president. It is important also to note that a driving force for reform is the younger generation of cosmopolitan and professionally competent Uzbeks who have studied abroad and are eager to see their country catch up with the developed world. Finally, the very habits of social discipline that caused Uzbeks to accept the government's stern policies between 1991 and 2016 may cause them to embrace the more open practices embodied in the reforms, provided they lead to economic progress.

Nor is the spirit of progress without deep routes elsewhere in the region. It is hard to imagine that any successor to President Nazarbayev will be less open to modernity than Nazarbayev himself, or that young Kazakhs will be any less energetic in advancing their interests. Kyrgyzstan, too, boasts a large modern sector maintained by the younger generation, as indeed does Afghanistan. Tajikistan and Turkmenistan may be lagging in civic initiatives designed to push their economies and societies into the modern world, but this could change quickly as their governments remove impediments to investing in Afghanistan and developing its educational and civic institutions. These and other factors, reinforced by the ongoing process of reform in Uzbekistan, the largest and most central country in the region, make the prospects for progress throughout the region brighter today than at any other time since the establishment of the new sovereignties.

Why Central Asia Counts for America.

Drawing back from these practical concerns, a more fundamental question arises: why should the United States care about what happens in Central Asia, including Afghanistan? A standard response of both Democratic and Republican administrations for the past quarter century is that the region is surrounded by nuclear-armed powers and the U.S. is not interested in seeing them come into conflict over it. Allowing a power vacuum to develop there, or for a single power—whether Russia or China—to gain hegemony there, would be a sure formula for conflict. Far better for the region to develop to the point that it can provide for its own security than for any external power to seek to stabilize it from without.

This thesis is definitely valid, and justifies U.S. support for the policy of balanced relations with major external powers that all governments in the region champion. This is not easy. The blunt reality is that to balance pressures from Russia and China, the U.S. and West generally must expand their engagement with Central Asia.

It should be noted that this formulation accepts the terms of what has been called “The Great Game” and merely seeks to minimize its negative impact. It is a strategy that

occurs "over the heads" of the Central Asians themselves, who are reduced nearly to the role of spectators to their own fate.

Central Asia as an Epicenter of Muslim Civilizations

Fortunately, there are further and even more compelling reasons for the United States to engage actively with Central Asia as a region. A half century ago leaders of China, Russia, Europe, and the U.S. shared the view that "Central Asia" is in fact peripheral, a remote and problematic dead zone rendered significant mainly as a buffer between great powers. This has now changed fundamentally. It is increasingly understood that for 3,000 years Central Asia was the one region that was in direct contact with all the other centers of Eurasian economic and cultural life from Europe to the Middle East, India, and China. As such, it dominated trade and finance throughout Eurasia for a millennium.

Beyond this, it was, for more than half that time, the unparalleled center of world scientific and philosophic life. Here were the greatest centers of mathematics, astronomy, and medicine between the ancient Greeks and the Renaissance. Suffice it to say that it was Central Asians who invented trigonometry and reinvented algebra, a Central Asian who was considered the final authority on medicine in medieval Europe, the Middle East, and India, and a Central Asian who, in the year 1025, hypothesized the existence of North and South America as inhabited continents.

Let it be noted that Central Asia, no less than Saudi Arabia or the Arab Middle East, has full claim to being an epicenter of Islam thought and practice. Islam's second most Holy book was the work of a native of Bukhara in Uzbekistan, while most of the Sufi cults that thrive across the world of Islam today had their origin in Central Asia.

Because of all this, the views of Central Asians on Islam and its relation to the state are of genuine significance to the entire Muslim world. And on both points, Central Asians have much to offer. Thus, they mainly adhere to the Hanafi school of Muslim jurisprudence, theologically the most moderate and also the most business-friendly of

the four main schools. Hanafi Islam gives reason a bigger role in the pursuit of truth than the other schools and Central Asia is in fact the epicenter of Hanafi Islam.

Ther U.S. Should Support Muslim Societies with Secular States, Laws, and Courts.

And what about the relation of religion to the state? Central Asian states are all secular, with secular laws, courts, and educational systems. Even the nominally "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" in fact has a legal system based on Roman law. Indeed, the five former Soviet countries of Central Asia, as well as Afghanistan, present the largest group of Muslim societies anywhere that are ruled by secular governments, laws, and courts. Together they present a model for the relationship between religion and the state that is all but unique in the Muslim world and which holds great promise for the future.

This is not to say that any country in the region has perfected this model. All, to greater or lesser extent, still show the distorting mark of Soviet Communism's hostility to religion. Yet in recent years every country has moved to free itself from this malign heritage, even as they seek to avoid the fanaticism preached by Islamic extremists from the Middle East, Iran and Pakistan. Several lend support to moderate Muslim institutions, presenting an approach analogous to that of England to the Church of England as opposed to France's policy of laicite towards the Catholic Church. But they all have protected their governments and legal systems from religious interference and are committed to do so in the future.

The United States has a real interest in the success of this model. It can be most effective in advancing it by working with (rather than on) the regional states to identify problems with their current practices and to devise workable alternatives. By this process, Central Asian countries can become models for the moderate and balanced development of Muslim societies elsewhere and a real alternative to Muslim extremism.

Viewed from this perspective, the six countries of Central Asia should be accorded a significant role in America's overall international strategy. The defense of secular states, laws, and courts as the best means of preserving religious freedom in all societies is a truly global concern, and one which the U.S. should be actively advancing. A comprehensive review of its strategy towards the region offers Washington an ideal opportunity to embrace this cause and accord it the centrality it deserves.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.
Mr. Swerdlow.

**STATEMENT OF MR. STEVE SWERDLOW, RESEARCHER,
CENTRAL ASIA, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH**

Mr. SWERDLOW. Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, it's an honor to be here today.

My remarks focus on the remarkable changes that we are witnessing in Uzbekistan's human rights situation and also recommendations for how U.S. foreign policy can best promote lasting and meaningful improvements on the ground, and the key recommendation really is this—that in this time of, as has been noted, hope in Uzbekistan and political transition, it's really vitally important that United States continue to promote human rights—and the word engagement has been used here—but to engage in a principled fashion.

I think one of the lessons for U.S. foreign policy of the last 2 years in Uzbekistan, the releases of political prisoners, the remarkable progress on combatting child labor and forced labor in the cotton fields, is that pressure actually works, even in hard authoritarian cases like Uzbekistan.

So while some of the recommendations are that the U.S. continue to encourage positive change, expand educational exchanges like the Muskie program that's now no longer with us, it's also important not to lose sight of the fact that Uzbekistan remains deeply authoritarian with ongoing egregious human rights abuses such as torture and that it's important the U.S. not pull punches and keep speaking out and using public pressure where necessary.

In these past 2 years, we have seen some remarkable things, as my colleague Dr. Starr just mentioned.

We've seen about 30 political prisoners released. We've seen some restrictions being lifted on free speech and free expression.

We have seen about 16,000 people coming off the notorious black list that the security services keep, which mean that a person has to go in for police interrogations on a regular basis.

We've seen the president commit publicly at the U.N. to combat forced labor and child labor, and we have seen a rhetoric or a discourse of government officials being accountable to their citizens in Uzbekistan.

So it's a time of remarkable optimism in Uzbekistan, the likes which I've never seen. But I think it's important, again, to dwell here on the political prisoners.

Why are these 30 political prisoners—why are they the ones that have been released? They've been released because they were the specific individuals that the U.S. Government had been raising, along with the European Union and human rights groups, for many, many years.

I think it shows, again, the value of pressure, the value of speaking out, and it's also important to note another thing about these releases, which are so significant, and one—just to put it in context—one of the individuals I met recently that was released is a man named Samandar Kukanov.

He was the vice chairman of Uzbekistan's first independent Parliament. He was in jail for 24 years, which, next to Nelson Mandela

I think makes him the longest imprisoned political activist in history.

It's important to note that none of these people have been rehabilitated—that many of them have suffered torture and that is a discussion that's not really yet on the table in Uzbekistan.

I think how Uzbekistan deals with political prisoners opens this national dialogue, you know, the last 25 years of Karimov and the abuses that occurred will actually determine a lot about the general direction of democratization and human rights.

And it's also important to remember that there are still thousands of people imprisoned on politically motivated charges.

I just met the wife of one of them, a professor of Turkish studies named Andrei Kubatin. I met his wife about 2 weeks ago. He was tortured for no other reason, in fact, than he had shared publicly available documents about—historical documents with a Turkish diplomat and he was tortured. So it's important to keep in mind that this is ongoing.

On free speech, I talked to journalists in Uzbekistan and they tell me that now they're able to report about corruption, forced labor, and that is remarkable.

But, as you said, Chairman Rohrabacher, Radio Free Europe is still not operational. The BBC, which was promised accreditation about a year ago, has still not been able to get their local correspondent accredited and that is something that could be changed, I think, very quickly if it was raised in the right way.

On torture, we continue to see—continue to get information of really horrific torture. In one case, a journalist named Bobomurod Abdullayev, who was stripped naked in a freezing cell.

I met with him not long ago as well, and these are things where the president has spoken out on the need to combat torture. But the follow up—the implementation is lacking.

On freedom of religion I should mention that because we have a visit coming up by the U.S. ambassador for international religious freedom—Sam Brownback—which I think is expected in September.

We have seen a desire expressed in Tashkent to promote a more enlightened view of Islam, to have Uzbekistan be associated not with torture but be associated with Islamic enlightenment, education. That, of course, is very important.

But we still see the same restrictive regulations, especially on Christian communities, Jehovah's witnesses unable to register, Protestants unable to register, and Christians often being vulnerable to constant harassment, home raids and, of course, as I mentioned, thousands of independent Muslims still languishing in jail on politically motivated charges.

That leads me to sort of the key recommendations which I mentioned in the beginning, which is that we have seen a significant number of political prisoners released—30 in 2 years.

Child labor has really been—that's been a very successful effort on the part of the government now that focusses on forced labor. We still saw 300,000 people forced to pick cotton in the last harvest, according to the International Labor Organization, not according to human rights groups' findings.

And so it's important that Washington use the tools it has—use the International Religious Freedom reports, communicating that the country of particular concern designation is not going to be going anywhere as long as registration is so hard to acquire for Christian communities, as long as there are so many religious prisoners in jail.

It needs to use the Trafficking in Persons report. We saw an upgrade from Tier 3 to Tier 2 watch list for Uzbekistan but it's still important to communicate that there should be an end to forced labor.

And, of course, the U.S. shouldn't be afraid to use tools like Global Magnitsky for officials that have been responsible for a policy and practice of torture.

And finally, I would say the U.S. is a leader on these issues and it is important for Uzbekistan—I think hard to imagine that Uzbekistan can really democratize and move forward unless there will be a sober and difficult conversation about the past—some conversation about the past 25 years and some process that allows Uzbek citizens a real voice to discuss what has occurred and strategies for moving forward.

Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Swerdlow follows:]

**Testimony before the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats**

Hearing on Current Developments in Central Asia

July 18, 2018

**Steve Swerdlow, esq., Central Asia Researcher
Human Rights Watch**

Chairman Rohrabacher, Ranking Member Meeks, thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee on this important issue.

My remarks today focus on the changes we are witnessing in Uzbekistan's human rights situation and recommendations for how the US can best promote lasting improvements as this process of change unfolds. My key recommendation is that during a time of hope and political transition in Uzbekistan, it is vitally important that Washington maintain its strong commitment to promote human rights by pursuing a policy of principled engagement with Tashkent.

The US should encourage further positive changes on the ground and expand US educational exchanges and other forms of technical assistance. But it is also crucial Washington not lose sight of the fact that Uzbekistan's human rights challenges remain vast and that it continues to press the Uzbek government to make concrete improvements.

In the nearly two years since Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev assumed power following the death of his predecessor, Islam Karimov, he has taken some concrete steps to improve the country's human rights record. He has released some 30 political prisoners, relaxed certain restrictions on free expression, and removed thousands of citizens from the security services' "black list." He has also committed publicly to combat forced labor in the country's cotton fields, and to ensure increasing accountability of government institutions to the public.

These moves, coupled with Tashkent's efforts to improve ties with its Central Asian neighbors, have contributed to a sense of hope in Uzbekistan about the possibility for change not witnessed in many years.

At the same time, the Uzbek government remains authoritarian. The security services' powers remain deep and vast, free elections and political pluralism are distant dreams, and there are still thousands of people in prison on politically motivated charges. It is far from clear that Uzbekistan's still authoritarian government will follow up the steps it has taken thus far with institutional change and sustainable human rights improvements.

This is precisely why the US should continue its crucial support for human rights and democratic development in Uzbekistan, speaking out where needed, providing assistance, but also not being afraid to impose consequences when abuses are ongoing.

Political Prisoners

Uzbek authorities have released at least 30 political prisoners since September 2016, including Yusuf Ruzimuradov and Muhammad Bekjanov—two of the world’s longest imprisoned journalists, in jail for 19 and 18 years, respectively—and peaceful political dissidents like Samandar Kukanov, Uzbekistan’s first vice-chairman of Parliament after independence. Unlawfully jailed for 24 years, Kukanov had been one of the world’s longest jailed political activists, after Nelson Mandela.

That these 30 individuals were released is not random; they are the specific individuals whose unlawful imprisonment the US government, European Union, and human rights groups have been publicly raising for years, illustrating the lesson that even in the hardest cases like Uzbekistan pressure does—eventually—work.

But authorities have yet to embark on any meaningful strategy of truth and reconciliation that would lead to the legal rehabilitation of those freed—many of whom remain in terrible health due to the ordeal they experienced for decades. They are entitled to justice and reparations for the serious violations that they have endured, a process that is not yet on the table in Uzbekistan. Absent a sobering national dialogue about past abuses, it is hard to imagine Uzbekistan making the difficult leap forward toward the more democratic society its citizenry deserves.

Moreover, thousands remain imprisoned on politically-motivated charges. Two weeks ago, in Tashkent, I met the wife of one of them, Feruza Djumaniyazova, who told me about her husband Andrei Kubatin, a professor of Turkic studies, imprisoned in December—under the new president—on fabricated charges and subjected to torture. His crime? Sharing publicly available documents with a Turkish cultural attaché. Kubatin’s case—around which numerous scholars have rallied—shows that despite some efforts by President Mirziyoyev to rein in the security services, they continue to play an outsize role in the life of the country.

The US government should remain at the forefront of efforts to support the release of all people imprisoned on politically motivated charges. It should push for accountability efforts that will allow Uzbekistan’s citizens a real voice in the reform process and a chance to discuss their history without fear of retaliation. Rehabilitation and human rights education, with US support, are tools that could help avoid a return to the darkest days of the Karimov era.

Freedom of Speech and Expression

Freedom of speech and of the press have improved under Mirziyoyev but remains very problematic. With 56 percent of the population under 30 years old and increasing numbers of mobile internet users, both Uzbek and Russian-language online media are experiencing a period of growth and change. The president has urged the media not to hold back in addressing urgent social issues. As Human Rights Watch has found, some journalists are now covering sensitive issues such as forced labor and corruption that were previously taboo. They have helped bring to the fore cases of injustice or wrongdoing by officials that have spurred unprecedented debate on social media, and in some cases, remedial action.

Yet much of the media remains under state control, and censorship is the norm. Journalists self-censor because it is unclear where the “red lines” are. Much of the internet remains blocked, and several pioneering online outlets such as kun.uz, xabar.uz, and qalampir.uz, were mysteriously unavailable for a period last month.

It is a step forward that the Voice of America's correspondent received accreditation last month, but the government is still blocking the same for the BBC, which got the green light over a year ago to appoint a local reporter. Keeping a lid on genuine free expression and independent media remain government cornerstones. The US should press the Uzbek government to fully unblock the internet and extend accreditation to media outlets and reporters, such as Radio Free Europe.

Torture

Torture and other ill-treatment is endemic in Uzbek police custody and prisons. Human Rights Watch documented this in our 2011 report. In startlingly frank comments, the head of the Supreme Court, Kozimjon Komilov, admitted in May that evidence obtained by torture had regularly been used in court. "We have indeed closed our eyes to this sensitive issue for many years," he said.

A November 2017 law bans using torture-tainted evidence in court. But there are few signs that torture has stopped, as the recent case of a journalist, Bobomurod Abdullayev, shows. He was arrested in September 2017 – a full year after Mirziyoyev became president – and charged with plotting to overthrow the government. The openness of his Tashkent trial drew praise, including from Human Rights Watch, but the torture he suffered is chilling. Abdullayev was brutally beaten, kept naked in a freezing cell, and not allowed to sit down or sleep for six days. Although in May, the judge who oversaw Abdullayev's criminal trial called for an investigation into the torture he suffered, no meaningful action has yet been taken.

Justice Minister Ruslanbek Davletov said in May that there would be "no impunity" for officers who use torture. And in June several security agency officers were jailed for their role in the death and torture of a businessman. The US should press the Uzbek government to ensure that zero tolerance for torture and ill treatment becomes the norm —by holding accountable those responsible when torture does occur by ratifying and implementing the optional protocol to the Convention against Torture and by allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to conduct independent prison monitoring. These would be important steps forward.

Freedom of Religion

With a visit to Uzbekistan by US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom Sam Brownback expected this September, Washington is closely watching Uzbekistan's restrictions on religious freedom. Since 2006 the US has designated Uzbekistan a "country of particular concern" for its serial and ongoing violations of religious freedom, which include banning all forms of proselytism, strictly regulating all forms of religious worship, clothing, and even the sermons delivered by the country's imams.

An important step forward in the past year was Tashkent's removal of over 16,000 people from the notorious "black list"—which requires citizens to report for police interrogation and restricts their ability to get a job or travel. In public remarks accompanying the move, President Mirziyoyev emphasized the need to rehabilitate citizens who had been "misled" by radical groups. In a speech to the UN General Assembly in September he touted Uzbekistan's identity as a center for Islamic education and enlightenment.

The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion, Ahmed Shaheed visited Uzbekistan in October. At a press conference, he stated that "resilience against religious extremism can be built on strengthening diversity as well as freedom of religion or belief," adding that religious freedom rights "cannot be sacrificed in preventing or countering violent extremism."

Despite these moves, authorities have yet to amend the criminal code's overbroad definition of "extremism" which has been used to imprison many peaceful religious believers (as well as non-believers) on politically-motivated grounds. Moreover, regulations issued last month on the registration of religious communities, including Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses, continue Tashkent's long-standing restrictive approach, leaving Christian communities in Uzbekistan vulnerable to constant harassment, home raids, short-term administrative detentions, and the denial of registration. Congress should remain vigilant on the issue of religious freedom and make clear that the CPC designation will be maintained absent demonstrable progress.

Forced Labor

In June, the United States upgraded Tashkent from Tier III to the less critical Tier II "watch list" in the State Department's annual trafficking report, which assesses Uzbekistan's efforts to combat forced and child labor in the cotton fields. Responding to significant pressure to end forced labor—by children and adults-- in the cotton sector, the Uzbek government in 2017 made significant strides. President Mirziyoyev acknowledged and pledged to abolish forced labor in his address to the United Nations General Assembly last year. At the start of last year's harvest, the government issued a decree prohibiting the forced mobilization of public sector workers, including teachers, medical personnel, and students into the cotton fields, which resulted in many forced laborers returning to their homes and places of work and study. However, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that approximately 300,000 people were nonetheless forced to pick cotton during the 2017 harvest.

Independent cotton monitors like Elena Urlaeva, whom Human Rights Watch met recently in Uzbekistan, have welcomed the existence of a meaningful, regular dialogue between government officials, the ILO, and independent civil society on the issue of forced labor that was unimaginable two years ago. But it is still much too early to declare the issue solved.

Human Rights Watch has called on Uzbekistan's parliament to hold televised hearings during the harvest featuring independent activists like Urlaeva. We have also called on authorities to hold regular press conferences during the harvest season to educate citizens about their rights.

Key Recommendations to the US Government

For more than two decades, the US government has shown a strong interest in promoting respect for the rule of law, good governance and human rights in Central Asia and in Uzbekistan. The departing US Ambassador, Hon. Pamela Spratlen, has set a powerful example of leadership on human rights issues by publicly voicing her support for Uzbekistan's embattled human rights defenders and on more than one occasion during her three-year tenure spoke out publicly to condemn attacks on civil society. We hope to see more of this kind of principled diplomacy from Washington as a whole.

The human rights improvements Uzbekistan has witnessed over the past two years demonstrate a valuable lesson for US foreign policy: public pressure on human rights abuses, combined with principled public diplomacy, even in a highly authoritarian country, can reap very concrete benefits, such as the release of a significant number of political prisoners and advances in the fight to eliminate forced labor.

Washington should continue to use tools such as the International Religious Freedom Report, Annual Human Rights Report, Trafficking-in-Persons Report, discussions on military assistance under the Foreign Appropriations Act, and the Global Magnitsky Act, to articulate clear reform expectations for Uzbekistan.

Specifically, the US should urge Tashkent to:

- Release all persons imprisoned on politically-motivated charges, and take measures to provide justice and reparations for those who have already been released;
- Ensure that domestic and international independent civil society organizations can register in Uzbekistan and operate without government interference;
- Invite the thirteen UN special rapporteurs that have requested access to the country, to visit beginning with the special rapporteur on torture;
- Immediately and fully unblock the internet and grant accreditation to local reporters and representatives of domestic and international media outlets, including the BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe;
- End religious persecution, including by decriminalizing peaceful religious activity, and ordering the release of thousands of people imprisoned solely for nonviolent religious expression
- Eliminate forced labor of adults and children in the cotton sector, and permit international and independent national nongovernmental organizations and activists to conduct their own monitoring without harassment;
- Restore funding for educational exchange programs and fellowships, including the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate program, that formerly brought hundreds of Uzbeks to the US as master degree students

True support for the reform process underway will require the US to continue to press Tashkent to bring its laws and practices into line with its international human rights commitments. Washington should push for accountability efforts that will allow Uzbek citizens a real voice in the reform process and a chance to discuss their painful history without fear or retaliation. It also, however, will require pressing Uzbekistan to allow citizens to freely discuss and examine the past 27 years of egregious rights abuses, including widespread torture and politically-motivated imprisonment, committed during the Karimov era. This will not be easy an ask for either Uzbekistan or the United States. But it is a necessary investment in a more democratic, open, stable, and prosperous Uzbekistan, and US-Uzbekistan relationship.

Mr. Chairman, my sincere thanks once again for the opportunity to address this subcommittee. I am happy to respond to any questions you or your colleagues may have.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much.

STATEMENT OF MS. SPASKA GATZINSKA, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, EURASIA, NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

Ms. GATZINSKA. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Meeks, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for holding this timely and important hearing on current developments in Central Asia.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Could you please put the mic up a little bit closer?

Ms. GATZINSKA. Sure. Is this better? There we go.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes. Thank you.

Ms. GATZINSKA. On behalf of the National Endowment for Democracy and our partners in the field, I would like to thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to Central Asia and we very much welcome your remarks on the importance of continued engagement.

With congressional support, the Endowment has promoted the democratic development of the region since the early 1990s. Currently, NED supports over 50 domestic, civil society, and media organizations in their steadfast efforts to advance democracy in Central Asia.

For the record, I would like to point out that the endowment is a grant-making organization and does not take positions on U.S. policy.

Despite sharing a common Soviet heritage, these five countries all facing unique sets of challenges as they continue to reform their political systems and economic structures. I will focus my remarks primarily on Uzbekistan because of lack of time. But I think we all look forward to addressing questions about the other four countries in Central Asia.

The single most important event, as has been pointed out, is the sudden death of Islam Karimov in September 2016, who had ruled Uzbekistan with an iron fist since before the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

It is well known that President Karimov created a kleptocratic dictatorship where the chosen few held absolute political and economic power while relentlessly persecuting and silencing independent, civic, and political voices.

Under Karimov's rule, independent civil society, media, and political opposition were all decimated and the ability of international organizations and donors to operate in the country was severely restricted.

Given this context, it is not surprising that observers watched with trepidation the first 6 months of President Mirziyoyev's ascent to power.

What has followed since then is a series of official statements promising a broad range of much needed reforms. I want to repeat much of what my colleague at Human Rights Watch has already mentioned in terms of developments and positive and negative events that have occurred since then.

Instead, I will go into more detail on the reform process that has been unfolding over the past 2 years.

A cornerstone of the reform process is improving the rule of law as the new government understands it urgently needs to attract foreign investment in order to rescue its ailing economy.

Although no comprehensive reform map has been issued, it is clear that the government's priorities are fighting corruption, liberalizing the economy, and promoting the rule of law.

Uzbekistan has already secured Russian investments and trade agreements, which only have reinforced Russia's extraordinarily influential, political, and economic role in the region.

Similarly, China's impact has grown over the years and it is currently Uzbekistan's largest trading partner. Uzbekistan has already opened its borders with neighboring countries, rekindled trade agreements, and is showing signs of asserting itself as a leading regional power.

While still working to improve its longstanding relationships with China, Russia, and its neighbors, President Mirziyoyev has taken deliberate steps to reach out to the U.S. and to the West.

The May 2018 visit to Washington was the culmination of President Mirziyoyev's overtures to the U.S. In addition to promising continued economic reforms, Uzbekistan has requested technical assistance from the U.S. for implementing rule of law reforms, which could result in opening markets to more U.S. businesses and technologies.

The Center for International Private Enterprise, for example, has started a program to support the development of nascent businesses associations and to foster their ability to advocate on economic and policy issues.

These developments offer a unique opportunity. Although undeniable progress has already been made, it is best characterized as an ad hoc approach to individual opportunities rather than a well thought out reform agenda.

A much more systematic approach is needed and there are many ways in which independent domestic civil society can contribute meaningfully and constructively to the reform agenda such as providing expert policy recommendations and holding the government accountable to its promises and to international norms and standards.

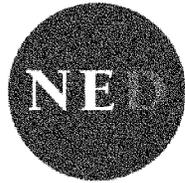
In order for that to happen, the government of Uzbekistan could take specific steps that would significantly improve the operating environments for civil society and media.

Items on the agenda of domestic partners include easing cumbersome administrative procedures for NGOs, removing restrictions on freedom of movement and association, providing accreditation to independent, domestic, and international media, allowing international donors and organizations to return to their country and to operate freely, and finally, removing the outdated exit visa model which has already been suggested by President Mirziyoyev.

These tests will be a welcome sign to domestic and international audiences to Uzbekistan is truly dedicated to working toward the success of the reform process.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Gatzinska follows:]



National Endowment for Democracy

Supporting freedom around the world

Current Developments in Central Asia

Testimony by Spaska Gatzinska
Associate Director for Eurasia
National Endowment for Democracy

Before the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
United States House Committee on Foreign Affairs

July 18, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this timely and important hearing on current developments in Central Asia. I welcome the honor to speak to you today on some of the challenges and opportunities for the continued democratic development of the region. And on behalf of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and our partners in the region, I would like to thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to Central Asia.

With Congressional funding, the Endowment has promoted the democratic development of Central Asia and Eurasia since the early 1990s. Currently NED supports over 50 civil society organizations and media organizations in their steadfast efforts to advance the democratic development in each country of the region: Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Despite sharing a common Soviet heritage, these five countries are all facing their own, unique set of challenges as they continue to reform their political system and economic structures. Unfortunately, we do not have time today to explore in depth the complexities of the domestic context of each country. Therefore, I would like to focus my remarks on the significant opening in Uzbekistan and the opportunity this provides for the country itself, for improved regional cooperation and development in Central Asia, and for greater engagement with the US.

The single most important event of the past two years was the sudden death of Islam Karimov in September 2016, who had ruled Uzbekistan with an iron fist since before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. President Karimov created a kleptocratic dictatorship where the chosen few held absolute political and economic power while relentlessly persecuting and silencing independent civic and political voices. The human rights violations of the Karimov regime are well documented by, among others, my colleagues at Human Rights Watch. Under Karimov's rule, independent civil society, media, and political opposition were all decimated and the ability of international organizations and donors to operate in the country was severely restricted.

Given this context, it is not surprising that observers watched with trepidation the first six months of President Mirziyoyev's ascent to power in late 2016 and early 2017. What has followed since then is a series of official statements promising a broad range of much needed reforms, from the economic sector to government institutions and even the legislature. In what was seen as an early positive sign in delivering on these sweeping promises, President Mirziyoyev signed and ratified the International Labor Organization Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, something Karimov had discussed but failed to do for over a decade. In addition, the government finally admitted the existence of forced labor in the country, which marked a significant break with former practices. The NED-funded Solidarity Center, in collaboration with other domestic and international organizations, had been working towards this goal for over a decade.

This was only the beginning. Rustam Inoyatov, the head of the feared and previously all powerful National Security Service of Uzbekistan was removed from power and the agency's mandate was reduced. Political prisoners were released and for the first time in 30 years, there are no imprisoned journalists in Uzbekistan. Access to Skype and Viber has been restored and some independent news sites unblocked. Select international journalists, such as Nabvahor Imamova of Voice of America, were granted accreditation and allowed to visit the country and conduct journalism trainings.

A cornerstone of the reform process is improving the rule of law as the new government understands it urgently needs to attract foreign investment in order to rescue its ailing economy. Uzbekistan's former reputation of a kleptocratic country where any one company can be subjected to exorbitant bribes, forcibly taken over, or forced out of the country, had resulted in limited interest to invest among private companies. Although no comprehensive reform map has been issued, it is clear that fighting corruption, liberalizing the economy, and promoting the rule of law are at least stated as the government's priorities. Uzbekistan has already secured Russian investments and trade agreements which only enforces Russia's extraordinarily influential political and economic role in the region. Similarly, China's impact has grown over the years and it is currently Uzbekistan's largest trading partner and has already committed to additional investments. Uzbekistan has largely opened its borders with neighboring countries, rekindled trade agreements, and is showing signs of asserting itself as a leading regional power.

Meanwhile, the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development is returning to Uzbekistan to support small and medium sized businesses and the financial sector.

While working to improve its longstanding relationships with China, Russia and its neighbors, President Mirziyoyev has taken deliberate steps to reach out to the US and the West. The May 2018 official state visit to Washington was the culmination of President Mirziyoyev's overtures to the US and the visit was lauded as a resounding success. In addition to promises for continued reforms, Uzbekistan requested technical assistance for implementing rule of law reforms that will increase the independence, transparency, and professionalism of the judiciary. Additional economic reforms could result in opening up markets to more US businesses and technologies. The Center for International Private Enterprise has already started a program to support the development of nascent business associations and to foster their ability to advocate on economic policy issues.

Uzbekistan's renewed interest in engaging with the West at the same time as it works on domestic reforms provides a unique opportunity. Many domestic and international observers are still asking whether President Mirziyoyev is willing and able to deliver on his reform promises. Although undeniable progress has already been made, it can best be characterized as an ad hoc approach to individual opportunities rather than a well thought out reform agenda. A much more systemic approach is need in the year ahead and this is the where the international community and domestic and international civil society organizations can play a constructive role.

There are many ways in which independent civil society can contribute meaningfully to moving the reform agenda forward, including by providing expert policy recommendations and holding the government accountable to its promises and to international norms and standards. In order for that to happen, the government of Uzbekistan could take some specific steps that would significantly ease the operating environment. Some of what has been on the agenda of domestic partners is removing cumbersome registration, authorization, and notification procedures for nongovernmental organizations; easing restrictions on freedom of movement and association, which will allow for independent monitoring and reporting on the situation in the country; providing accreditation to local and international independent media; allowing the return of international donors and international organizations; and removing the outdated exit-visa model. These steps will be a welcome sign to domestic and international audiences that Uzbekistan is truly dedicated to working towards the success of the reform process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on this important topic, and I look forward to your questions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you all very much for joining us today and trying to give us some direction on what type of policies will achieve the positive goals that we all have.

But can I—I would like to ask the panel how many political prisoners are there in this region and what countries are they in?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Well, Uzbekistan leads the pack and, in fact, in all the former Soviet space, Uzbekistan has more political prisoners than all former states—for former Soviet states combined and the estimates are really hard to—it's hard to be exact because the country was closed for so long.

But I think on the more conservative side we are talking about thousands of people. We are talking about perhaps 70,000.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Uzbekistan—

Mr. SWERDLOW. Uzbekistan.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. There are—in Uzbekistan there are thousands of political prisoners now.

Mr. SWERDLOW. Right. And to be precise, what I mean by that are mostly—the vast majority of these are individuals that have been convicted on the extremism charges, which are vague, over broad, extremely broad charges that have been used against mainly independent Muslims in Uzbekistan.

So we term those political because those statutes are often used for political purposes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. What about in the other countries in the region?

Mr. SWERDLOW. In Kyrgyzstan the one very notable political prisoner now is Azimjan Askarov, the human rights defender—ethnic Uzbek human rights defender who's been in prison now since the June 2010 Osh events.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Could you repeat that? How many people? Where did you say?

Mr. SWERDLOW. I am referring to Kyrgyzstan and we don't compare figures that often, but Kyrgyzstan the notable case of Azimjan Askarov is really high on the agenda of Human Rights Watch.

In Tajikistan, there we've seen a rapid increase in arrests over the past, I would say, 4 years and we estimate something between 150 to 200 political activists mainly from the now banned opposition party.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. So there are 200 or 250 people you'd consider political prisoners and that is in Tajikistan?

Mr. SWERDLOW. That's Tajikistan. That includes a few—one journalist just last week convicted on a 12-year charge, about three lawyers, and the rest political activists, and then—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So thousands in Uzbekistan and 60 in Tajikistan. What about the rest?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Well, about 200 in Tajikistan.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Kazakhstan is—

Mr. SWERDLOW. Maybe you want to speak to—

Ms. GATZINSKA. I would like to add that we don't often hear about Turkmenistan, which has been very closed off and the number of disappeared political prisoners is very large.

There is a project that is run by a consortium of organizations called Prove They're Alive, which is trying to force the government

of Turkmenistan to acknowledge how many political prisoners there are, how many of them are still alive, and so forth.

In Kazakhstan, I would say that it is difficult to put a number to the number of political prisoners for two reasons. One, there's no agreement on what constitutes a political prisoner. There's a lot of trade union activists who have been imprisoned because of their trade union activities.

There is also a journalist in media who have been imprisoned for their freedom of speech activities. But in terms of political prisoners, I would highlight the fate of the now-banned political movement Alga, which was heavily financed and related to Abyazov and among those there's upwards of 200 political activists who remain in prison over the past 3 years.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. So we are talking about people being held now that are in the hundreds?

Ms. GATZINSKA. Yes, and—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. What about Kyrgyzstan?

Ms. GATZINSKA. So for Kyrgyzstan, there has been an increase in high profile political prisoners. I would mention too one is Omurbek Tekebaev who used to be one of the leaders of Ata-Meken, one of the most prominent political pro-democratic parties in Kyrgyzstan.

He was sentenced on corruption charges right before the presidential election last year, and this was largely seen as a political move to prevent him to run for president.

There have been other cases where political opposition figures who came afoul of the former president—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Do you have a number for me?

Ms. GATZINSKA. I would imagine probably less than 20.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Less than 20?

Ms. GATZINSKA. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. I am just trying to get a sense about it.

Dr. Starr.

Mr. STARR. Well, first of all, these are impressive figures. I wish there was some way of checking them rigorously. There really isn't, which is assumed to be the case, and I mean, there isn't a means of checking them because of the closed nature of these data.

But let us—let us, for a moment, take these figures at face value. They seem to me decisively to disprove Mr. Swerdlow's assertion that pressure actually works.

I agree with him that pressure can work and at times does work. But we've used it as our sole tool and the large numbers that have just been cited are proof to me that we should have another tool and that other tool is working with rather than on these people.

And let me give as an example an organization that might have been mentioned earlier under civil society groups and that is an organization called Regional Forum that was set up by a Slovenian—remarkable Slovenian woman named Mjusa Sever.

She has been working in Uzbekistan for 10 years with some American support and European support. She has worked with rather than on the ministry of justice with the ministry of internal affairs.

She has brought members of their supreme court here to sit down with American lawyers for weeks on end and discuss exactly the problems that my colleagues have raised.

These are important issues, it seems to me. She—through her decade-long work, she actually participated in the drafting of many of the laws which are now being implemented and offer some signs of hope for the future.

So my strong urging here is that we shift the balance from yes, pressure should continue, but from pressure to working with rather than on these people. That will produce results and numbers that are more credible than what we've had.

Mr. SWERDLOW. Can I just add to that, very quickly, and say that I think the case of Human Rights Watch right now in Uzbekistan is—supports what you say in the sense that now there's actually a period politically where we can sit across the table from the Uzbek government, many Uzbek officials from a number of ministries, and it's understood that we have a critical independent role to play and that there's nothing—criticism doesn't have to be toxic.

I actually—I see a dialogue now between our organization—you know, I was actually deported from Uzbekistan 7 years ago or 8 years ago, like many people from the NGO community and the journalistic community, and now I've been able to have these really difficult conversations and we talk about yes, we understand that this is a painful conversation to talk about this number of political prisoners—let me explain why we call them political prisoners—let us talk about all these issues, and that conversation is taking place.

I would say I agree with you that you do have to work with, not on. But I think, again, I don't think those approaches are mutually exclusive and I think shining light on these issues is really important.

And finally, I will say that we asked the Uzbek government recently, very recently, to give us a list of all the prisoners under—imprisoned under these charges and we are still waiting for that data.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Do we have an American ambassador in each of these countries or is—are there vacancies?

Ms. GATZINSKA. There's currently a vacancy in Tajikistan and there is a vacancy in Kyrgyzstan that, if I am not mistaken, is considered to be filled.

We have a very strong and excellent ambassador in Uzbekistan, Ambassador Spratlen.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. You have him—is he an ambassador now?

Ms. GATZINSKA. She's about to be.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Right now—so right now there is a vacancy in Tajikistan. Are there other vacancies?

Ms. GATZINSKA. In Kyrgyzstan as well.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Kyrgyzstan. Okay.

Ms. GATZINSKA. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And what are the other countries we have American ambassadors present?

Mr. STARR. The problem goes beyond representation. Do they meet as a group—do they consider their mission a regional one or rather—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I understand. I am just trying to get an understanding right now some of the—

Mr. STARR. I think we have them everywhere now.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Are there vacancies in all of these countries? No.

Mr. STARR. No. I think there are none today.

Ms. GATZINSKA. No. So Dan Rosenblum has been nominated as ambassador to Uzbekistan.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Uzbekistan.

Mr. SWERDLOW. You have to be confirmed.

Ms. GATZINSKA. Yes. Yes. You have to be confirmed.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. We do not—okay. Okay. So in these five countries we are talking about here, where is the—is there an active ambassador in one of them? Where?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Well, as I understand it, Ambassador Spratlen is still in her position and still active, and—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Is there someone now who's been appointed by this administration who is now currently there as an ambassador, right?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And one—and then the other countries of the region, what—which country is it who has the ambassador? Is that—who are we talking about.

Mr. SWERDLOW. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Ambassador Krol is there. Oh, he's leaving. So there's a number of people getting ready to leave but they're still in their positions.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes. I am just trying to find out—you know, I went to Belarus. I remember I went there a couple years ago and I was very surprised when we landed and there was no ambassador in Belarus, and I asked why there wasn't an ambassador in Belarus.

I mean, the embassy had a small staff and they came to see us at the airplane and he—it was described well, we had the political prisoners—we are protesting the political prisoners and thus we don't have our—have an ambassador and later on when we talked about political prisoners I said, okay, I want to get a briefing on who these political prisoners are.

And, apparently, there were six of them and yes, there was a couple—one guy who had been arrested who was—had run for president against the current leader and he got arrested immediately after the election and he was certainly a political prisoner but two of them were in the young anarchist movement and they had been arrested for throwing a Molotov cocktail at some embassy.

And it didn't seem to me to be—justify not having an ambassador because there were two political prisoners in the country, and Uzbekistan, if they have thousands of political prisoners, here's the follow-up question: Should we then have a U.S. ambassador in Uzbekistan if they have thousands of political prisoners?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Absolutely. I mean, I think, as we've been discussing, we all agree on engagement. I think the point I am trying to make is principal engagement, shining light.

The more information we have—I think it actually even benefits the Uzbek side and, again, I want to stress, as I mentioned in my remarks, there have been—there has been a new discourse about religion, as Dr. Starr said, about changing the approach.

But the problem is that these habits dies hard and the government has certainly legitimate security concerns. We recognize that.

But thousands of people, I think, mostly in the late '90s, beginning with—after the passage of the 1997 law on religion, which was really one of the most restrictive in the world, you had thousands of people landing in prison following trials without due process.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. I am going to—I've got to let my colleagues have some time here, too. But there will be a second round, and Mr. Meeks, Dr. Starr really has something he wants to say. Go right ahead. Then Mr. Meeks can take over.

Mr. STARR. Yes. This is—this is a vexing problem on representation. But just having people there isn't enough.

Twenty-five years ago, these were all former Soviet states so they entirely still spoke Russian. Russian is not the national language of any of the countries we are talking about. It is an official language for intercultural communication within Kazakhstan along with Kazakh.

We have had ambassadors in this region who actually made a serious effort to learn local languages. But not—but to have someone in these countries who doesn't know the local language and is not making a good faith effort to learn it is basically to say as clearly as a big power can to a small power that we really don't take you seriously. That doesn't lead to the kind of dialogue you're talking about.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. All right.

Mr. Meeks.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

And speaking of Russia, Russia has maintained strong security ties to the region by leading the Collective Security Treaty Organization security bloc and by deploying missile defense systems within the region.

Now, Uzbekistan is not a member of the treaty but in 2017 it conducted military exercises with Russia within its territory.

Following Russia's actions in Crimea, Kazakhstan, from—you know, in talking to some of them, has become increasingly concerned about its northern neighbor, particularly since about what we just talked about—23 percent of its citizens are ethnic Russians.

So my question is do you think Russia will try to stir up ethno-nationalist sentiments in Central Asia, given the region has a sizeable ethnic Russian population? Because that's something that was happening in Ukraine and Eastern Ukraine.

And when I've talked to some Kazakhstanians it's what they're telling me their concern is.

Dr. Starr.

Mr. STARR. Russia, which is a great and noble European civilization that's made great contributions to our common culture, is suffering from what might be called a hangover.

It is an imperial hangover. It's what France went through after World War II. The North Africans were actually citizens of France.

Then they decided that they wanted to be independent and the 4,000-some Frenchmen died in the ensuing battles and, finally, Charles de Gaulle came along and said, enough. He said, let's—there's a better France without these colonial territories.

Putin is exactly an anti-de Gaulle. He said, no, we are—we are not us until we have our space recreated. And so it's a problem. It will remain so for a while. Not permanently, because the generation that thought that way will eventually pass on.

It is a problem for Central Asians. Their combined response is very clever. They've said, look, we want good relations with Russia. It's close by. We must have good relations there. We don't want them bothering us. We will use China to balance Russia.

Then, a few years later around 2001, they said, well, you know, these are two great neighbors of ours—let's use the United States and Europe to balance China and Russia.

And now, because for the last years before—until very recently we basically—were basically saying what we were not doing in Central Asia, they basically couldn't do the balance. We were not playing the role they assigned in this balance, which is, it seems to me, good for everyone.

So this is—this is the challenge. It is absence of serious discussion of security, which both of you mentioned in your presentations. It's the absence of that, as we discuss these other issues, that has led to this situation and opened the door for misbehavior from the north.

Mr. MEEKS. Most of you basically agree with that? Anything to add?

Ms. GATZINSKA. What I would like to add is that at least from what we've seen from our partners on the ground there's a very pragmatic approach toward Russia. There's an understanding that Russia's influence in Central Asia is strong and it's not going to decrease.

So in a way, Russia doesn't necessarily need to stir up ethnic concerns because their extraordinary influence in the region is not threatened.

Kazakhstan is a little bit different and we have heard the same things that you mentioned, Congressman Meeks, where they are concerned particularly about the northern regions. But those may be a little bit overplayed, from what we hear on our partners on the ground.

Mr. SWERDLOW. I might just add that I think in some ways the human rights crisis in Russia, which is probably the worst it's been, you know, since the early '90s, mimics and repeats some of the worst human rights practices that were pioneered in Central Asia in terms of the restrictions on the internet, a really restrictive approach to freedom of religion, and a lot of other issues that seemed to really—you know, the revenge of the past, in a way, with Putin coming back to the presidency in 2012.

I would say an interesting observation about Uzbekistan, though, is I think if, you know, Islam Karimov bequeathed a sort of healthy skepticism toward Russian domination I think that's one of the legacies of his foreign policy was to sort of try to ensure Uzbekistan maybe having more of a maverick and independent stance than, let's say, Kyrgyzstan, which is much more pro-Russian and I think—so I don't worry as much that despite the sort of oversized footprint in the media landscape that Russia occupies in a place like Uzbekistan I don't see Uzbekistan necessarily being—I think it maintains its own course and will continue to do so and that's one of the lasting imprints, in a way, I think, of Karimov's governance.

Mr. MEEKS. So let me just add on that. With the sanctions that we currently have on Russia, is that affecting the Central Asian countries? Is there any spillover to the Central Asian economies?

Mr. SWERDLOW. It affects the economy in the sense that you had hundreds of thousands of Central Asian migrants, mostly in the construction sector in Russia, that had to leave and many of them returned, for example, to Tajikistan without places to work and that's caused a lot of panic at times—that you could have a lot of unrest in Central Asia—and you also have the cooperation ongoing between the Russian FSB and the security services of all the Central Asian governments. We've seen extraditions, kidnappings, abductions of Tajik dissidents in Russia.

So that continues to go on and it's a very intractable problem.

Ms. GATZINSKA. And if I can just add quickly a little bit about that is that the sanctions are impacting the Central Asia in a way that, as part of the Eurasian economic union, Russia has not been able to deliver on a lot of the promises that were made when, for example, Kyrgyzstan joined the union and a lot of the investments that were expected were not—they have not materialized as time went through, which has led to some disillusionment with the Eurasian economic union.

Mr. MEEKS. My last question, and then I want to turn it over is, you know, I think economies have to diversify, and I know in talking to some they have been talking about they want to diversify their economies. Do you think they are serious about diversifying their economies and if so, do you think that that will then have some sort of political impact on the regimes?

Mr. STARR. Yes and yes. [Laughter.]

I am a trustee of Nazarbayev University. It is working like mad and pouring huge amounts of money to train people in fields needed to diversify the economy and the Uzbeks are doing the same thing. Everyone is now. They realize that the old energy economy isn't forever.

But if I can just add a note with regard to Russia because it came up on the economics side. Russia—the easiest way for them to misbehave in Central Asia is the old divide and conquer formula—play one against the other.

The Central Asians are, I believe, naturally very tactful people. Maybe it's because they've been—they've had to be for so many millennia with so many neighbors in every direction.

But as such tactful people, they are promoting their regional cooperation—the regional organization that they're seeking to make.

The regular meetings of presidents with Afghanistan—they're promoting that not just as a solution to their diversification and development in many ways but also as a way to balance outside pressures.

They say to the Russians, look, you're concerned—you claim to be concerned about security, about drugs, extremism. Let us handle these things. We can provide our own security. Stay out. Let us do our job.

This is what they've been proposing and we should be strongly backing that. It's not against anyone. It's not against Russia. It's not against China. It's not against America or Europe.

The only—everyone benefits if this region is stabilized, diversified, from within rather than through pressures from without.

Ms. GATZINSKA. If I can just—I don't—I agree with that. But I would add that economic diversification can only succeed if it's coupled with rule of law reforms, transparency, and accountability in order to fully feel the positive impact of economic diversification.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you.

Mr. SWERDLOW. Just to add one final point on the economy, I think it's interesting to see that the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are really active in Uzbekistan.

And so Human Rights Watch is calling on them to condition their investments and their loans on concrete demonstrable human rights progress and, as Spaska has said, on transparency, anti-corruption efforts, and then I think another piece of this is educational exchanges.

As we said in the beginning, a lot of Uzbeks are talking about returning even from the U.S. to build the country and I think if the U.S. can invest more in educational exchanges for Uzbeks students and for all Central Asian students that can only be a really powerful and good thing for the region.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, and we now have Congresswoman Kelly. Would you like to come down here and take over for Mr. Meeks?

Mr. Meeks, she's taking over for you now. Remember that.

Ms. KELLY. For 5 minutes. [Laughter.]

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to the witnesses.

From listening to the three of you, it sounds like you feel the region is moving in the right direction and becoming more open, especially following the 2016 change of rule in Uzbekistan, and since then, the president has taken reforms to improve the rule of law and release political prisoners, even though, in listening to you, there's many, many, many, many more to be released.

Ms.—am I saying your name right—Gatzinska?

Ms. GATZINSKA. Perfect.

Ms. KELLY. All right.

You said in your written testimony that Uzbekistan reforms have been more ad hoc as opposed to a part of a larger reform agenda, and in speaking with us you mentioned a host of areas that should be tackled as part of the reform agenda.

What would you suggest be first and would produce the most progress?

Ms. GATZINSKA. If I can make two suggestions rather than one.

Ms. KELLY. Sure. Two is fine.

Ms. GATZINSKA. One is what the Uzbek government has already requested is technical assistance from the U.S. and from others. They're not necessarily looking for funding but they realize that they lack the professional knowledge, the technical knowledge, to make the reforms that they need to do.

Whether it's within creating a working legislature or whether it's structuring their economic ministry or other government agencies, they really are hungry for that knowledge.

So more exchanges, more expertise, more experts going to Uzbekistan or bringing them here would be a huge benefit as they reform their legislative acts or administrative procedures or restructure their various government agencies. So I think that, since they're eagerly awaiting it, would be a huge benefit for them.

The other—the other side of that is I think civil society—an active vibrant independent civil society who can provide policy recommendations and who can hold the government accountable as they reform the process, as they fight corruption, would be incredibly beneficial and it does not have to be necessarily an adversarial relationship.

It can be the two of them working together toward the same goal—a more open diversified economically and a more—I hesitate to say more democratic but certainly more open Uzbekistan and I think lifting the restrictions on civil society and allowing them to more freely operate is absolutely crucial.

Ms. KELLY. And beside the technical assistance that you talked about how can the U.S. assist more in what you want to do or what you want to see done?

Ms. GATZINSKA. I think—give me 1 second to look at my notes—I would throw in two things. One is, overall, removing the exit visa model that Uzbekistan still remains. They've made statements that they're looking into it. It will take some time.

Allowing international donors and organizations to return to their country is incredibly important, and what we've heard from various sources is that the administrative and legislative acts do not exist for international organizations who are forced out to return.

So that's something that needs to be done. So that's something that we can absolutely engage with them on.

Ms. KELLY. Thanks.

And Dr. Starr, you advocated for the U.S. to promote security by strengthening their internal capacities and their capabilities as a group rather than by subordinating either of them to some externally imposed order.

How do you envision this being done and how can the U.S. improve the conditions of all nations and provoke any insecurities?

Mr. STARR. Well, as you approach this question, the first step would be to review very carefully what was done under NATO's Partnership for Peace program, which flourished in Central Asia for many years.

Even to this day, NATO is bringing officers from these countries to its campus in Germany for very valuable sessions of various sorts.

I would review that first. But the answer to your question is to ask rather than tell, and I think if we were to sit down and begin the dialogue that we've never really had on security—we haven't for 15 years—we need it. We need it urgently, and have—and it should be very candid and nothing should be off the table.

Then, having had that dialogue on security, we could then ask how do we integrate our security interests with our interests in economic development or our interest in education, our interest in rights and democratization.

I think that's the only way we'll end up with a strategy and when we wrote this book, "The Long Game," it is a long game. We need to sit down and think this through from scratch.

It's time to do it and, as both of our Members of Congress who addressed us at the beginning said, it is—this is the right time to do it, through a new form of engagement, not just adding more of this or adding more of that.

Ms. KELLY. Did you want to—did you want to say anything, add a comment?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Sure. Well, just on this overall question of what can be done, I mean, I think—I agree it's a long game. I agree that the approach has to be noncondescending, of course.

But at the same time, many of these concerns are longstanding, obvious, they're out there, and it's clear to me that the Uzbek government has been listening these past, let's say, 13 years since the Andijan Massacre when you had hundreds of peaceful civilians—largely, peaceful civilians—that were killed in a massacre. After that, the government sort of shut down.

But what's interesting is these past 13 years the government heard these longstanding demands and so reinstating the rights of journalists to report, that's, in a way, low-hanging fruit that can be done quickly and it's—and I think it just takes some more prodding—a combination of private and public diplomacy.

I did want to mention also the legal profession. In order for this to work, we are going to need to see a bar association that is genuinely independent and we have a visit coming up from the special rapporteur of the U.N. for the independence of the judiciary coming in the fall.

So one of those concrete things that can happen would be that the bar association be allowed to become genuinely independent of the government.

So there are a number of these things that actually I don't think they're that difficult and they can happen. It just requires, I think, sustained pressure and also ongoing—these forums that allow for this discussion to take place like the annual bilateral consultations and the C5+1.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you

Mr. STARR. Can I come back to the sustained pressure issue? I don't disagree with that. There's a value to it.

On the other hand, I want to stress that the remarkable development in Uzbekistan of a defendant's bar—you know, lawyers who are qualified and up to world—Western standards on defending the accused, this is moving forward very quickly.

When was this all developed? It was developed during the 10 years that we spent a lot of effort just berating them for their flaws.

But during—quietly, working under the radar, this Mjusa Sever who I referred to from Slovenia with some American money and European money managed to get the members of the supreme court of Uzbekistan here and to sit down for weeks on end for serious discussions of exactly the sort we are talking.

We could do this. We are beyond the need to berate them. We have to come up with concrete, okay, what do we do about it.

Now, again, we've talked a lot about Uzbekistan. However, we—henceforth, we have to think of all these issues that you rightly are raising in a regional context and we should hold out this if we are willing to do something in one country let's hold it out for the others as well and if we are not we should say so and say we are not really on board with your new regionalism.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, and Ms. Kelly, I am going to have—we are going to have a second round, which means I will be able to ask some more questions and if you would like a second round you will be able to ask more questions as well.

How many—when we talk about the political prisoners that are in these countries like Uzbekistan, how many of them are Christians who have been in some way prevented from trying to express their Christianity?

Mr. SWERDLOW. Well, talking about Uzbekistan, in the case of Christians usually these are short-term what are called administrative detentions, sometimes for 15 days.

For the most part, organizations like Forum 18 that look at religious freedom in the region have not catalogued long-term.

There have been, in the past several—in the past, let's say, 10 years there have been cases of 1-year, 2-year imprisonment terms for Baptists, Protestants.

But at the moment, at present, I am talking about there are only short-term administrative detentions. The vast majority of abuses that we see—

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, so the actual—

Mr. SWERDLOW [continuing]. Towards those communities are arrests, home raids, confiscation of Bibles, and, you know, inability to register.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. This is—this is a Muslim population country but we actually have relatively light, let's put it, persecution—I wouldn't say that—that there's been—there's no overall repression of Christianity, even in these Muslim-dominated countries. Sounds like—

Mr. SWERDLOW. There's a total ban on proselytism—absolute, complete, and total ban. So if were to join hands at this table right now we would be arrested for engaging in malicious activity.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. And is that true for the Muslim population of those countries as well?

Mr. SWERDLOW. It's also strictly regulated. All forms of worship, yes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. And which leads us to radical Islam. Having visited Uzbekistan, I can—and having driven between

Mazar-i-Sharif and Tashkent, I know that territory and it is definitely within the range of Afghanistan, which is, of course, as we know, for the last three decades, been absolutely in the middle of a bloodbath and of repression and of radical Islam.

So when you look at that and you understand that right across the river is being controlled by the Taliban at different times and what we've just heard is that many of the prisoners that we are talking about are Islamic prisoners and not Christian prisoners, doesn't that indicate that perhaps that these—their government is trying to keep from what was happening in Afghanistan from happening in Uzbekistan and isn't that a good thing?

Mr. SWERDLOW. I would say this. Human Rights Watch completely recognizes that there are very legitimate security concerns and one of the things that we've been recommending in terms of dealing with this issue of thousands of people in prison is that there should be a commission, a body, a mechanism—some body that looks at case by case all of these cases and where there are—where there's credible evidence of a connection to violence in the case of an individual, certainly, they shouldn't be released and they should be tried in a credible way.

But what is often the case—and I keep uncovering these cases—I mean, for example, Aramais Avakian, a fisherman from Jizzakh, who's actually a Christian and an Armenian, was convicted on charge 159, the extremism statute, as an Islamic jihadist.

But he's actually Christian and he's Armenian, and we was sentenced for no other reason than the fact that he was an entrepreneur and there was some local competition in his area of Uzbekistan. So we see the misuse and abuse of these charges.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Okay. Okay. Let's get to this then because you can anecdotally—you can talk about anecdotal information.

The Saudis have pumped billions—billions of dollars in the last 30 years into promoting a Wahhabi concept of their faith, which is a type of Islam that will result in governments like the Taliban and social institutions controlled like the Taliban.

And when I have travelled through those areas and different places, you see these mosques that are built by the Saudis.

Doesn't that seem to suggest that the Saudis during this time period have targeted countries like Uzbekistan for a radical—for radicalization of their faith?

Mr. STARR. There's absolutely no question about that. It's not just the Saudis. It's some Kuwaitis. It's many others, and this has been a very seriously pursued campaign with lots of money, which is channelled through private foundations of very wealthy people in the Gulf. They get the money out there to Central Asia and the rest follows.

Now, I think the beginning of your question is—we should return to it, and that is, look, these are neighbors of Afghanistan and they know Afghanistan in many cases better than we do.

You can speak Uzbek in Mazar-i-Sharif. You can speak Tajik all over the place because it's the same national language—government language—and so forth.

The fact is the Central Asians themselves have asked—have invited Afghanistan to join Central Asia. They want to invest in Af-

ghanistan. They are actually doing it. They want to play a role in the pacification of Afghanistan. We should be welcoming this.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, let me put it this way. I don't believe that they—people of that area, at least the ones I've talked to, and I don't think it's rational that, unless you are yourself, someone who believes in this radical form of Islam that wants to relegate women to having to wear burqas and have the type of brutality against people to enforce their faith, which is part of that radical part of Islam, I don't think the people—people don't want that, and you want to invite Afghanistan into your midst, you're going to have to be facing that type of radical Islam.

Mr. STARR. From abroad, largely. Let me stress something that hasn't been mentioned here and that is everyone in Central Asia overwhelmingly they belong to the—adhere to the—of the four legal schools in Islam, the Hanafi, who are the most nearly open to reason, most nearly open to business, to trade, to normal activity of the four schools.

They are not generically Muslim in the sense that the—that the Saudis are or, for that matter, the Pakistanis.

The Afghans are part of this. Now, within that, there is another current going back 1,000 years that's associated with a guy from Samarkand.

When you eventually visit there, you can visit his tomb, and that is Maturidi, who, again, was the great champion of reason as opposed to just blind faith or dogma to conduct human affairs.

So they really come from a different corner than the Gulf and this actually holds great prospects, especially because they are increasingly, as the Uzbeks have done expertly, embracing this and saying, look, we favor moderate and enlightened Islam, not this other stuff.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, let's—let me put it this way. When you have—you're right, it's not just the Saudis—but you have had this major investment of billions of dollars in madrassas schools, for example, where they're teaching kids how that they're—how not to read and write and do arithmetic but how to read the—their Koran and that's about it.

And people coming out of the madrassas schools has served—frankly, served the cause of a radical revolutionary repressive form of Islam and that has been financed.

And when I remember when I went to Uzbekistan that that was one of the things that was pointed out to me is that they have had to stop that type of Islam from moving forward, which it sounds to me, considering many of the people you're talking about who are political prisoners are not Christians but instead are Muslims.

So it would indicate to me perhaps this isn't just a sign of a repressive government but perhaps it's the sign of people who are fighting against an incursion of the worst kind of anti-freedom Islam that is—that was—is, clearly, available, to see in Afghanistan.

Mr. STARR. There's a very interesting reality. We devised, in the West, a hypothesis 20 years ago that the reason extremism arose in Central Asia was because of repressive governments.

There's no doubt there were repressive governments and that under them were some of the people you're talking about. But then

it turned out that Kyrgyzstan, which had by far the most open and permissive laws on religion and practice and faith and so on and the large Christian population—by the way, under—heavily influenced by Korean Protestants—that Kyrgyzstan, with its very mild back then laws, was in fact a hotbed of extremism and it turns out that Kazakhstan, which also had very tolerant laws, was being—was facing exactly the people you’re talking about brought in from the Gulf.

So yes, this is a serious problem and until we address it, ultimately, these people will be in its thrall.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Well, I would hope that we do not, which is unfortunate, many times when people are trying to come to grips with an authoritarian government that is involved with some type of repressive system, look, we have to make sure that we are not acting in a way which will result in a totalitarian type of government, which is 10 times more repressive.

I remember when—right now, I see General—this is another area—but General Sisi of Egypt under attack. Well, fine. When the Muslim Brotherhood takes over, what kind of government will Egypt have? That’s a whole other area.

But when you compare that to Uzbekistan, it seems to me that perhaps that effort coming out of Afghanistan and the money coming out of radical Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia—and by the way, we should celebrate the fact that the new—the changes going on in Saudi Arabia may reflect that they’re pulling away from that type of activity. But we know they’ve been doing that for decades.

One last thing about this. I just thought I would leave this with a story about my excursion into that region. I went—this was shortly after they had the liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban and I was in Mazar-i-Sharif, which is a beautiful city and has a beautiful Blue Mosque there and they have the doves that fly around.

It’s a beautiful place—very inspirational—and but to get back I had to get to Tashkent. There were some meetings in Tashkent I had to go to as well, and anyway it’s quite a drive between Tashkent and Mazar-i-Sharif and it was dark.

So I was in a car that was—and I will have to tell you we just had one pistol in the car and that was our only method of defending ourselves should anything happen, and the car—as we drove, it got darker and it was snowing.

It started to snow, and here we are in the mountains and it’s beginning to snow and it’s dark and we are driving through and all of a sudden I noticed there were a large number of young men coming from the roadside and this was—I was going, uh-oh—you know, do we want a U.S. congressman to be kidnapped by some radical group in the mountains in Uzbekistan.

And so we are watching these young men come up to the car and surround the car, and we’re—as I say, it’s dark. We are in the middle of nowhere. It’s up in the mountains. It’s snowing and so the driver starts talking to them and I assume the worst.

But I will tell you what happened was the driver turned around and said, now look, these young men are offering to help escort us down the hill because the road is so slippery they’re afraid the car might fall off the cliff.

And here I was, looking at these young men with this uh-oh, my goodness, there must be something bad about to happen because I had all that stereotype in my mind.

But instead, these young people had been taught very good values. They were going to help someone to escort—they were going to, hopefully, earn a little money because they would hope for a tip, I am sure.

But they were doing something wonderful to help prevent some people they didn't know from having an accident and perhaps losing their lives by sliding off a cliff in the middle of a snowstorm.

And so I think that that shows, I think, all of us—it showed me—that we have to not just always assume the worst and that we can try to actually work with people and find out who they are and they—and find out that there are some very positive elements to these cultures.

And so anyway we appreciate—I am going to give each one of you 1 minute to summarize and then we are going to adjourn.

So, Ms. Gatzinska, we'll start with you because you have been wanting to say something for a few minutes and I haven't been able to get you. So make it 2 minutes for you.

Ms. GATZINSKA. Thank you. I appreciate that.

I just wanted to make a quick comment in response to religious extremism in Central Asia and I would go back to rule of law and the ability of citizens to seek redress for injustices in a lot of ways, whether it's Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan when there is a sense among the population that there is a repression and they're not being heard.

They are looking for outlets. Whether those be religious outlets or within the legal system, they will find one, and when the legal system or their government is failing them, they will keep searching until they find something that may not be the ideal solution.

And when it comes to Tajikistan, which has been incredibly repressive toward expressions of Muslim attire or Muslims in general, I think the danger is that they're going over toward being too repressive and forcing people into hiding where they're more likely to encounter those extremist views that we are afraid of.

Ultimately, just in summary of what I will say, I would like to, again, thank you for the commitment to Central Asia and echo both what Steve and Dr. Starr have said is that continued engagement is crucial.

Whether it be with carrots or sticks, it needs to happen and it needs to happen now because now is where we have the opening in all five countries.

Thank you.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you.

Mr. SWERDLOW. On religious extremism as well, it's a hornet's nest. Very complicated, but by all means, I completely agree with you and with Dr. Starr that the moderate form of Islam in Central Asia that's traditionally existed has to be celebrated, promoted, studied, examined.

But by all means, these are not mutually exclusive ideas. You can—you can respect human rights and you can also ensure security at the same time, and I want to dispel the notion that any-

thing I've said about religious prisoners is based on anecdotal evidence.

It's based on facts collected over, you know, 15 or 20 years. When you scratch the surface of these cases, what you start to understand is very often people are imprisoned because scores are being settled in the local communities—people being labelled extremist when they have absolutely no connection to anything like that.

The government does have the right to ensure security. But it should do so while respecting due process. I also want to say I think when you're looking at Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, remember that this is a totally and entirely different legacy.

This is a Soviet legacy, different legal and socio-political context where literacy was extremely high—is and has been extremely high educational levels.

So it's—I think it's a little bit dangerous to try to hold those examples up to one another. I agree with Spaska, it's about this overbearing approach can often tilt the balance the other way.

We saw a campaign in Tajikistan to forcibly shave beards off of 13,000 men. Two years ago, we saw a campaign where the women's state committee stood on the street corners and ripped hijabs off of women.

That often pushes people in the wrong—the other way, and we saw the number two commander of ISIS was a Tajik who, when he made his video to join ISIS, he referred to these sorts of practices of offending the religious sensibilities of Muslims in this sort of—his very self-serving propagandistic video.

So that balance has to be struck. I think it can be, and the guide should be international human rights and the constitutions which very much recognize this balance of freedom of religion and due process and human rights.

So thank you very much for holding this hearing.

Mr. STARR. Mr. Rohrabacher and Mr. Meeks in, again, their statements by indicating this is a period of unusual opportunity and I think that just—we can't stress that too strongly. This is a rare moment. We've got to seize it.

Now, what does that mean? First, it means understanding that this is now not just six countries—not five countries, not six.

It is a region. We are not organized in any way to deal with it as a region. We need to be. Ten, 15 years ago, I suggested that the State Department should move Central Asia out from under the same bureau that Russia—that covered Russia because I said you will never—you will never see—recognize its distinctiveness if it's always treated as a sort of subordinate part to Russia. That was done. They established the Central South Asia bureau.

Now, that needs to be adjusted so there is a real Central Asia unit somehow. I don't know how but it needs to be done.

And, finally, we have to coordinate much better than we do these three or four stools of our policy—Pentagon, the State Department, the Commerce Department, and others.

They need to work together. There has to be a single strategy. One has to reinforce the other and that isn't the case today.

We leave our friends in the region wondering if they're dealing with three different governments. We should enable them to deal with one—the United States.

Mr. ROHRBACHER. Thank you all for your insights and advice. When you visualize—and I was very interested in your concepts of visualizing a region rather than focus on one country at a time—I think there's some very valid strategy there on how to have an impact.

When we look at this part of the world, this is a huge chunk—I like to say that I believe that's the center of the world, and whatever is going to dominate that part of the world will have an influence on the rest of the world—a major influence—and if we—if it becomes a radical Islamic situation where that becomes a major force in that region, it will be a disaster for the things that we believe in the United States or in the Western civilization as promoted or a moderate Islam as promoted. What a disaster for that.

But if it became an area of where the economy is thriving and people are able to communicate and we are able to have some respect for the rule of law, that could stabilize the entire world as well. It could serve as a very positive role.

And so what the witnesses are saying now is we have that opportunity to perhaps succeed in moving toward that positive end as compared to what maybe even 5 years ago and 10 years ago looked like this would—there wouldn't be this type of opening and opportunity.

So I appreciate you helping draw the attention of those of us in Washington and, hopefully, people who will read the transcript will—around the world will be a little more enlightened so—and we are more enlightened by your testimony.

So thank you, and I declare this hearing adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 5:59 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats
Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA), Chairman

July 13, 2018

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held by the Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats in Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building (and available live on the Committee website at <http://www.ForeignAffairs.house.gov>):

DATE: Wednesday, July 18, 2018

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

SUBJECT: Current Developments in Central Asia

WITNESSES: S. Frederick Starr, Ph.D.
Chairman
Central Asia Caucasus Institute

Mr. Steve Swerdlow
Researcher
Central Asia
Human Rights Watch

Ms. Spaska Gatzinska
Associate Director
Eurasia
National Endowment for Democracy

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.



COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF SUBCOMMITTEE ON Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats HEARING

Day Wednesday Date July 18, 2018 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 4:28 pm Ending Time 5:59 pm

Recesses 0 (___ to ___) (___ to ___)

Presiding Member(s)

Rep. Rohrabacher

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session
Executive (closed) Session
Televised

Electronically Recorded (taped)
Stenographic Record

TITLE OF HEARING:

Current Developments in Central Asia

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Meeks, Rep. Kelly

NON-SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT: (Mark with an * if they are not members of full committee.)

N/A

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes No

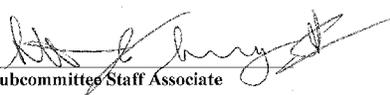
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: (List any statements submitted for the record.)

None.

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or
TIME ADJOURNED 5:59 pm


Subcommittee Staff Associate