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Uzbekistan's Eviction Notice: What Next?

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On July 31, Uzbek President Islam Karimov served notice on the Pentagon that the U.S. should vacate the Karshi-Khanabad military base (K-2 in military parlance) within six months. In the post-9/11 era, this is the first time that a U.S. ally has not only abandoned the battlefield—as Spain did in Iraq—but also shown American servicemen the door. After years of complaining that the United States has not done enough to counter terrorist threats, Karimov did what his Islamist foes have demanded all along: He demanded an end to the American “infidel” presence in Uzbekistan.

Clinging to Power. Karimov took this drastic step because he believed that the U.S. policy of support for democracy might lead to a “multicolor” revolution in Uzbekistan, which is predominantly Muslim but has a secular government. Indeed, Mr. Karimov's authoritarian practices, which have left the population impoverished and intimidated, have built up internal political pressure that could lead to a social explosion and destabilization.

When Uzbek troops killed hundreds of civilian protestors while trying to put down an Islamist uprising in the city of Andijan on May 13, Washington joined other Western governments in demanding an international investigation. In response, Uzbekistan limited night flights at K-2, which is located 90 miles north of the Afghanistan border. When the United States supported the

evacuation of Uzbek refugees from camps in neighboring Kyrgyzstan to Romania, including some suspected militants—that Karimov demanded be repatriated—the curtain went down on K-2.

Geopolitical Context. In July, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) demanded that the United States provide a timetable for the withdrawal of its forces from Central Asia. The SCO is a regional bloc dominated by Russia and China that includes all five Central Asian states, with India, Iran, and Pakistan as observers. Beijing and Moscow are clearly using the SCO to establish their dominance between the Pacific Ocean and the Baltic Sea, as evidenced by the

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- The U.S. should expand military, intelligence, and law enforcement cooperation with the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan;
 - Secure regional access for military activities and negotiate overflight rights with Uzbekistan; and
 - Reach out to a broad range of political forces and individuals in Uzbekistan.
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joint Sino-Russian military maneuvers involving 10,000 personnel scheduled for August 18–25. The SCO is also becoming a vehicle to keep dangerous democratic ideas out of the region. Moscow and Beijing appear to have exerted pressure on Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to send the U.S. military packing, but so far only Karimov has obliged.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
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Although the Uzbek move ostensibly demonstrates the SCO's power, in reality, it probably has as much to do with Karimov's need for international protection for his regime. Russia and China are willing to disregard the human rights violations of authoritarian regimes in order to draw them into their orbit. Thus, after the Andijan massacre, Beijing greeted the visiting Karimov with a golden handshake—a \$600 million natural gas contract. Moscow stated that the repression was an “internal affair” of Uzbekistan and did not join demands for an international investigation. However, Karimov will likely wake up one day and find himself being squeezed between the two giants.

What Should Be Done. The United States can continue operations in Afghanistan without K-2. In fact, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld has already visited Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and has made arrangements for alternative bases. Manas, Kyrgyzstan, near the capital Bishkek, is likely to take the brunt of the displaced U.S. cargo air traffic and support missions. Other U.S. assets will be relocated to the Bagram and Kandahar airfields in Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, the United States is still interested in maintaining a presence in Uzbekistan—civilian and military. First, overflight rights are important. Second, the Ferghana Valley is a hotbed of Islamist unrest and needs monitoring. Third, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration wants to maintain a foothold.

To secure its geopolitical presence in Central Asia, the U.S. should:

- **Expand military, intelligence, and law enforcement cooperation with the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.** The U.S. should strive to strengthen these countries' military, border guard, customs, and financial control capabilities, and their ability to fight

radical Islamist and terrorist organizations. Additionally, the United States should expand training programs for their military officers in the United States and conduct joint exercises.

- **Secure regional access for military activities.** Such access will require a diverse basing infrastructure, including some redundancy in vital regions. This, along with the correct technological investments, will ensure that America's ability to respond to crises will not be compromised by local politics.
- **Negotiate overflight rights with Uzbekistan.** This can occur if Karimov is willing to keep the door open to future rapprochement with the United States.
- **Reach out to a broad range of political forces and individuals in Uzbekistan.** These should include members of the Karimov Administration and the spectrum of moderate Muslims who really care about their country's future. The U.S. should reiterate that the U.S. and Uzbekistan still share many common goals, including fighting terrorism and radicalism and supporting the independence and economic development of Uzbekistan.

Conclusion. U.S. interests in Central Asia are long-term and will not disappear with the evacuation of the Karshi-Khanabad military base. The U.S. needs to follow a long-term strategy that includes fighting the war against terrorism, securing U.S. vital interests, and promoting freedom in Eurasia's heartland.

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