



## Anger as US backs brutal regime

Human rights concerns as troops put down uprising in Uzbekistan



**Nick Paton Walsh in Moscow and Paul Harris in New York**  
**Sunday May 15, 2005**  
[The Observer](#)



Heated criticism was growing last night over 'double standards' by Washington over human rights, democracy and 'freedom' as fresh evidence emerged of just how brutally Uzbekistan, a US ally in the 'war on terror', put down Friday's unrest in the east of the country.



Outrage among human rights groups followed claims by the White House on Friday that appeared designed to justify the violence of the regime of President Islam Karimov, claiming - as Karimov has - that 'terrorist groups' may have been involved in the uprising.

Critics said the US was prepared to support pro-democracy unrest in some states, but condemn it in others where such policies were inconvenient.

Witnesses and analysts familiar with the region said most protesters were complaining about government corruption and poverty, not espousing Islamic extremism.

The US comments were seized on by Karimov, who said yesterday that the

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protests were organised by Hizb ut-Tahrir, an Islamic group often accused by Tashkent of seditious extremism. Yet Washington, which has expressed concern over the group's often hardline message, has yet to designate it a terrorist group.

Scott McClellan, the White House spokesman, tried to deflect accusations of the contradictory stance when he said it was clear the 'people of Uzbekistan want to see a more representative and democratic government. But that should come through peaceful means, not through violence.'

Washington has often been accused of being involved in a conspiracy of silence over Uzbekistan's human rights record since that country was declared an ally in the 'war on terror' in 2001.

Uzbekistan is believed to be one of the destination countries for the highly secretive 'renditions programme', whereby the CIA ships terrorist suspects to third-party countries where torture is used that cannot be employed in the US. Newspaper reports in America say dozens of suspects have been transferred to Uzbek jails.

The CIA has never officially commented on the programme. But flight logs obtained by the New York Times earlier this month show CIA-linked planes landing in Tashkent with the same serial numbers as jets used to transfer prisoners around the world. The logs show at least seven flights from 2002 to late 2003, originating from destinations in the Middle East and Europe.

Other countries used in the programme include Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Morocco. A handful of prisoners' accounts - including that of Canadian Maher Arar - that emerged after release show they were tortured and abused in custody.

Critics say the US double standards are

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evident on the State Department website, which accuses Uzbek police and security services of using 'torture as a routine investigation technique' while giving the same law enforcement services \$79 million in aid in 2002. The department says officers who receive training are vetted to ensure they have not tortured anyone.

The aid paradox was highlighted by the former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who criticised coalition support for Uzbekistan when they were planning invading Iraq, using similar abuses as justification.

Murray said yesterday: 'The US will claim that they are teaching the Uzbeks less repressive interrogation techniques, but that is basically not true. They help fund the budget of the Uzbek security services and give tens of millions of dollars in military support. It is a sweetener in the agreement over which they get their air base.'

Murray said that during a series of suicide bombings in Tashkent in March 2004, before he was sacked as UK ambassador, he was shown transcripts of telephone intercepts in which known al-Qaeda representatives were asking each other 'what the hell was going on. But then Colin Powell came out and said that al-Qaeda were behind the blasts. I don't think the US even believe their own propaganda.'

The support continues, seen by many as a 'pay-off' for the Khanabad base. The US Embassy website says Uzbekistan got \$10m for 'security and law enforcement support' in 2004.

Last year Human Rights Watch released a 319-page report detailing the use of torture by Uzbekistan's security services. It said the government was carrying out a campaign of torture and intimidation against Muslims that had seen 7,000 people imprisoned, and documented at

least 10 deaths, including Muzafar Avozov, who was boiled to death in 2002.

'Torture is rampant,' the reported concluded. Human Rights Watch called for the US and its allies to condemn Uzbekistan's tactics.

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