

1998

United States Foreign Policy and Media Coverage of Uzbekistan: A Case Study.

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U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND MEDIA COVERAGE OF UZBEKISTAN:
A CASE STUDY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
Master of Mass Communication

in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by

Mardon Nigmatovich Yakubov
B.A., Tashkent State University, 1995
May 1998

UMI Number: 1387485

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In writing this thesis, I have benefited from the advice and encouragement of numerous people. My family and colleagues at Uzbekistan National Television Company encouraged me to explore a bigger world by going abroad. I am grateful to staff at the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), and WorldNet, all in Washington, DC, for helping me with practical experience, intellectual guidance and financial support in preparing this project.

Many faculty members and fellow students at the Manship School of Mass Communication also helped. I owe an immeasurable debt to Dr. Richard Alan Nelson, Associate Dean at the Manship School and my major professor, who provided a vigorous academic challenge which made the flow of ideas into this thesis more appealing and whose invaluable support helped me successfully navigate the paperwork necessary to complete my degree. Thanks also go to Dr. Leonard Hochberg, Committee Member; and Professor A. Robert McMullen, Committee Member.

This study is one of the first attempts to shed light on the interplay between U.S. foreign policy and the elite press in regards to Uzbekistan, one of the 15 republics of the former Soviet Union. Any mistakes or shortcomings remain mine alone. I would appreciate any useful comments and suggestions from readers which would contribute to further studies I plan to undertake on U.S.-Uzbekistan relations. My address is: 9, Ibrokhim Rakhimov Street, Sobir Rakhimov district, Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reviews the impact of U.S. political interests on media coverage of Uzbekistan, a Central Asian republic which became independent after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. The study aimed to discover whether mainstream news organizations tended to report on this country from an ideological perspective established by U.S. policymakers.

The case study includes a content analysis (qualitative and quantitative) of coverage from 1991 to 1996 in three American elite newspapers: The New York Times, Washington Post, and Los Angeles Times. Stories were compared to extra-media data on U.S.-Uzbekistan relations at the time, including State Department reports, Congressional hearings, White House news releases, public speeches and other materials.

Striking similarities between U.S. policy towards Uzbekistan and the interpretation of political events appearing in American newspapers were found, with the picture of Uzbekistan and its government during this six year span a rather negative one. The democracy and human rights agendas advanced by U.S. officials apparently prompted editors and reporters to focus more on these subjects, while overlooking other topics. Evidence suggests American journalists served as a conduit for policymakers rather than as independent analysts. Although outside the period reviewed for the study, 1997 news accounts have tended to be more balanced and supportive--in line with the recent policy shift to more favorable relations with Uzbekistan by the Clinton administration.

The author argues that the continuing dependence of American media on government sources, in essence a surrogate function in terms of international affairs, does

not contribute to broad understanding of important issues. Rather, the overall impact of the interplay between press and government deprives the general public of a coherent view about foreign countries.

Key words: Agenda-setting, Central Asia, Developing Nations, Elite Media, News Bias, U.S. Foreign Policy, Uzbekistan.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 was a superquake of history that continues to present a set of new and largely unprecedented challenges to the West. The resulting emergence of five Central Asian nations (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) into the world arena remains an extraordinary phenomenon. These new republics, previously almost unknown in the West, have now joined the ranks of international politics as independent states.

The redrawing of the Central Asian map has compelled the government of the United States to shape a new policy toward these five countries that share a common language, a common culture, a common history and a desire to control their own affairs. Uzbekistan could be ignored as long as its domestic and international policies were dominated by its incorporation in the Soviet Union.

However, following the breakup of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, a number of books have been written about the country. Most of these studies deal with political and social movements characterizing the republic and its people. American scholars in their studies of Uzbekistan have pointed out that the late 1980's and early 1990's were marked by nationalistic growth. The emergence of dissident movements were followed by a revival of interest in Uzbekistan's historical and cultural heritage and the restoration of national traditions and customs. These developments created a necessary basis for the country's sovereignty (Critchlow, 1991).

As scholars stress, the democratic process in Uzbekistan has been more limited in scope and less pluralistic in nature. The root of the problem lies in the fact that, contrary

to most post-colonial governments. Uzbekistan's independence did not alter the republican power structure, leaving intact communist personnel whose authority is slowly challenged (Olcott, 1995).

Modern Uzbekistan is a topic worthy of more investigation. Most prior research has assessed the country as a component part of Central Asia; only a limited number of studies have specifically focused on this most populous state with 22 million people and huge economic potential. One of the reasons is that to date, American policy has been overwhelmingly directed toward Russia, with other states treated virtually as afterthoughts. Scientific research also reflects this attitude. Not surprisingly, in their studies, Western scholars have considered Uzbekistan as a state of incomplete national consciousness that will not be and act truly independent in the future.

But what interests do Americans have in the virtually ignored geopolitical region of Central Asia, with a population totaling 60 million? One of integral elements of American policy in Central Asia, as in the rest of the world, is to promote democracy, protect human rights and assist in creating open political dialogue. The U.S. government's commitment to human rights and democracy not only reflects America's world view and fundamental values but also serves its far-reaching, long-term economic and political interests. However, every region of the world is different and has its complexities, contradictions, and challenges. Thus America's democratic goals cannot be pursued simplistically in the strategic crossroads of Central Asia, since it has a predominantly Islamic culture, with more than 70 years of communistic heritage and poor economic development (Twining, 1993).

The U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs in the 102nd Congress stated: "We should not offer aid through administering a litmus test of "secularism" or even democracy. We must strive here, as elsewhere to build democracies. But in doing so we must recognize the complexity of the task. Newly independent nations with authoritarian traditions do not become democratic overnight. Here, as in Russia, it will take at least a full generation for democratic values to take root. We can help them take root by teaching them more about democracy and about America" (*United States Policy Toward Central Asia*, 1992).

One way to promote democratic values is through improved communication. Since its birth, the press has been considered a key factor in international relations (Douglass & Bomer, 1932) which often has diplomatic and economic implications (Coggeshall, 1934). The role of media as institutions of American democracy is deeply rooted in American history; the United States had a press long before it had a foreign policy. Moreover, freedom of the press has long been recognized as an essential component of U.S. foreign policy. In fact, the media community plays an important role in every international dispute (Stowe, 1936).

Over the years, the press has provided a vital link between the policymaking diplomatic communities and a number of key constituencies, with certain publications and broadcasts serving as standard sources for factual information (and sometimes propaganda) about the purposes and conduct of foreign relations.

The purpose of this thesis is to review one aspect of the ongoing relationship between the press and government in an international affairs context. Specifically, this case study deals with the impact American government exerts on media coverage about

Central Asia. The research focuses on the role played by the elite press in fostering democratic values with regard to Uzbekistan, the most populous and the second largest country in this region.

The questions to be answered include the following: How are U.S. mainstream media portraying Uzbekistan during the current transitional period from communist rule to independent international state? What kind of relations do journalists prefer with the leaders of an emerging country? Are reporters exercising independent judgment by challenging the assumptions of the dominant thinking that guides U.S. policy towards Central Asia or are they becoming a conduit for foreign policymakers, i.e., do news accounts reflect official U.S. views in international news reports about political life in Uzbekistan? What role do ideology and political interests play in how reporters conduct undertake their job? These questions and their possible answers provide a particularly interesting example of the dynamic interplay between American foreign policy and the press.

This research is intended to contribute to an understanding of the major factors which shape foreign correspondents' views and perspectives toward the country they cover. Since journalists occupy a special social status by being a major source of foreign affairs information, a critical examination of their performance may also offer an opportunity to broaden and improve the nature of international news coverage in the United States.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Before beginning the analysis of media coverage of Uzbekistan, it is necessary to review some historical background as well as major political, economic and social developments in this Central Asian country prior to and after its independence.

Uzbekistan is the former Soviet Union's fifth largest republic (173,591 square miles) and most important Muslim community, which in many ways serves as the model for other Islamic cultures in the region. Uzbekistan's 22 million population is ethnically heterogeneous, with more than 71 percent Uzbek, 8 percent Russian, and 5 percent Tajik. After the United States and China, Uzbekistan is the world's third largest producer of cotton.

The cultural origins of the Uzbeks are complex. The term "Uzbek," as the identifier of an ethnically distinct group, is one of ambiguity. In part, this is due to the many peoples who have conquered the region now called Uzbekistan. From the fourth to nineteenth centuries, control had been held by Alexander the Great, the Arabs, the Seljuk Turks of Khwarazm, Ghengis Khan, Tamarlane, the Timurids, and the Uzbeks. These Uzbeks were an amalgam of tribes of the once famed Golden Horde. Their first homeland, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, was in an area of Khwarazm (also called Khiva), north of today's Uzbekistan. They were originally a warlike, outlaw people; their name, Uzbek, became synonymous with "fear and villainy." In the fourteenth century Tamerlane, a great statesman of the medieval era, administered his empire of conquest from Samarkand, which was then one of the world's greatest cities and a center of Islamic culture (Allworth, 1990).

Uzbek khanates (states) fell to Russian imperialism between 1863 and 1876. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the area was transformed into the Autonomous Republic of Turkistan. In 1924, seeking to dissolve the indigenous Turko-Iranian complex, the Soviets put forward the name "Uzbek" in order to focus on an ethnic group with a great homeland and huge country. The goal was to build support for the new post-Cazrist rulers under the false mask of nationalism.

The fate of Uzbekistan under the communist regime represents perhaps the most tragic and least reversible example of the failure of the Soviet experiment that, in the name of an ideological goal, led to near destruction of the region, its people, and its culture. The Soviet-style modernization of Uzbekistan was comparable in many respects to that introduced by Western imperial powers in their colonies, but it was more sweeping and characterized by ideological and political constraints. Among the negative consequences of the Soviet system were the breakup of the region's natural unity and the destruction of the traditional society, which led to the suppression of Islam and violation of cultural norms. It also meant the obliteration of successive generations of indigenous leaders who dared to defend local interests and the deaths of millions during the collectivization campaign. It also brought total subordination of local interests to those of Moscow (Critchlow, 1991).

During the Soviet era, many Muslim believers were persecuted, "atheist indoctrination" became compulsory in educational curricula, and religious observance was driven underground. However, seven decades of communistic ideology failed to break down the centuries-long Islamic cultural mentality of the Uzbeks (Abduvakhitov, 1993).

As part of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan served mostly as the supplier of raw materials. The imposition on the region of a cotton monoculture to the exclusion of other crops had negative long-range economic, ecological, and social consequences. The insistence on ever larger yields placed a premium on quantity rather than quality of the cotton produced and stimulated intensive irrigation as well as excessive use of chemical fertilizers. For lack of adequate safeguards, both resulted in ecological catastrophe. The diversion of the waters of the region's two major rivers, the Syrdarya and Amudarya, both emptying into the Aral Sea, caused substantial shrinking of the sea's surface. At the same time, the fertilizer overload combined with faulty irrigation ditches allowed poisonous effluents to seep into subsoils affecting the region's water supply (Glantz, Rubinstein & Zonn, 1994).

In the face of economic bankruptcy, ecological disaster, and social and economic chaos, Uzbekistan declared its independence in September 1991. In fact, the suddenness of the transition to full autonomy caught both officials and the general public unprepared to exercise the prerogatives of independence. The declaration itself was couched in generalities, without a clear program for the future.

Visible signs of Uzbekistan's new status were not long in coming, however. Billboards proliferated proclaiming independence. The new national flag, with a subtly Islamic motif, was flown everywhere. Uzbek historians set about, with renewed vigor, to the task begun under *glasnost* (openness) of restoring their country's past by rescuing it from the Stalinist version as a primitive land able to progress thanks only to a helping hand from the Russian "elder brother." The glory days of the Great Silk Road and the Islamic Renaissance, when "Uzbek" regions such as Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khorezm

were at the pinnacle of world trade and civilization, replaced Marxist-Leninist ideology as a source of inspiration (Hiro, 1994).

After decades of official persecution of Islam, the newly independent government of Uzbekistan reversed direction by turning over to worshipers a number of mosques that had been held as state property and by fostering the construction of new religious centers. At his inauguration on January 4, 1992, President Islam Abdughanievich Karimov swore an oath on the Quran. Religious observance again became quite open, some Muslim holidays were made official and Islamic publications circulated freely.

If the blessings of independence created an initial atmosphere of euphoria in the minds of many people, a sober realization soon set in of attendant problems that in the long term could jeopardize not only independence but Uzbekistan's very survival as a nation. Above all, it became clear to Uzbeks that finding solutions to their problems was now up to them alone (Olcott, 1992).

The rapidity with which political freedom was brought to bear left this republic ill-prepared to fill the ideological void, leading to the proliferation of a variety of disturbing trends. The new nation, wracked by crippling problems, most notably massive unemployment and consumer shortages, now lacked a common external enemy to serve as a unifying force. Nationalism turned inward, accompanied by the fragmentation of society along clannic, local and ethnic lines. The resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism and the spread of ethnic conflicts in the whole region have become the main concern for many in Uzbekistan. There were haunting fears of a resurgence of the bloody ethnic violence of 1989 and 1990 that had broken out among Muslim nationalities in the Ferghana Valley. The panicky out-migration from Uzbekistan of other nationalities.

especially Russians, that had been accelerated by the Ferghana disturbances, continued, despite efforts by the government to induce non-Uzbeks to remain (Rashid, 1994).

Faced with these problems, the government has responded with weakness and inertia where initiative and imaginative leadership are badly needed. At other times it has resorted to repression. Recent events, such as the bloody Tajik civil war (which began in 1992), renewed domestic strife between Uzbeks and Tajiks, and growing opposition to President Karimov's rule from Islamic fundamentalists have led him to follow a harder line and lean toward totalitarian methods of rule. For example, Karimov has banned all religious and opposition parties, including the Islamic Renaissance party (a fundamentalist group), as well as the Nation Homeland Movement which upholds goals of secular political reform (Haghighi, 1995).

Despite his authoritarian rule, President Karimov has maintained popular support from all nationalities living in the region, mostly due to his economic reforms which are intended to propel Uzbekistan through the transition to a market economy. If one compares the economic situation today with the state of affairs under Soviet rule, it is possible to discern definite signs of progress.

Although ongoing research has provided important insights for the understanding of problems of the transition period in Uzbekistan, scholars nevertheless have inadequately explained the phenomenon of "failed democracy" characterizing not only this country but also other Central Asian nations. There seems to be a general void in exploring the contradictions between the mentality, traditions and consciousness of Uzbek people and democratic culture fostered by the West. What studies exist tend to relate the problems of democracy to "Communist nomenclature" and the personality of

the president, failing to take into account such factors as poor economy, low living standards, ecological problems as well as other social-economic concerns that hinder the democratization process in this post-colonial state.

Results of a public opinion survey conducted by the United States Institute of Peace among 2067 respondents in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan indicate that Central Asian publics who have expressed support for democracy often demonstrated vague or contradictory perceptions of what democracy entails as a political system. Since there is no history of democratic rule in these countries, democracy is perceived there as, at best, an ideal for some distant future but not the best system to help solve Uzbekistan's or Kazakhstan's problems today. In general, survey results suggest that the notion of democracy, and perhaps notions of other systems of government, are highly idealized in Central Asia. In the minds of respondents, the sense of fairness and the need for "decency" appear to be high, but other basic democratic values are still poorly understood (Lubin, 1995).

Clearly, given the lack of democratic elements in the republic's political life, the movement to democratic rule is proving a slow and painful one. To the extent that there is any hope at all of an eventual democratic evolution, it rests with Uzbekistan's native elites, the well-educated members of professions in the arts and sciences who in the Soviet period struggled against great odds to advance the cause of Uzbek autonomy.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL PROPOSITION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on the interplay between the press and foreign policy spans a wide spectrum of views. Most scholars examine the press role in foreign policymaking on the basis of the relationship between the press and the government. Although the link between the press and the government in the United States is enormously complex and subtle, it can be best understood within interdependence theory comprehensively identified by Entman (1989).

Interdependence theory assumes that the press does not enjoy the independent command over the news process that it would need to fulfill the normative ideals. The press functions within economic and political markets that cement interdependence and diminishes the press's autonomy. The economic market requires that news organizations compete for the audiences and advertising revenues necessary to maintain profitability and stay in business. In fact, profit goals shape the values that guide the creation of the news--brevity, simplicity, predictability, timeliness. Trying to minimize costs and generate profits, media organizations tend to look for the least expensive and easily accessible sources. The least expensive way to satisfy mass audiences is to rely upon legitimate political elites for most information. The elites who make most of news are the ones who control policy outcomes in Washington: top officials in the White House and executive branch agencies, members of Congress and powerful congressional staffers, representatives of important interest groups, and some party spokespersons. As Entman identified, "most of these convenient and logical sources have a stake in what is

reported." News reports can advance or undermine the policy proposals policymakers want enacted or privileges they want maintained.

The continuing dependence of reporters on elites and government sources helps perpetuate the journalistic status quo and creates the political market. "In the political market," Entman (1989, p.6) wrote,

elites and journalists vie with each other for control of the news. Each side peddles something the other needs. The elites have newsworthy political information, the indispensable raw material needed to construct the news. Journalists can provide publicity that can be slanted favorably or unfavorably. Elites seek to exchange a minimal amount of potentially damaging information for as much positively as they can obtain. Journalists seek to extract information for stories that generate acclaim or acceptance from editors and colleagues. Government sources and journalists join in an intimacy that renders any notion of a genuinely "free" press inaccurate.

Indeed, according to interdependence theory, competition in the political market enforces the requirement that government manages news; competition in the economic market enforces cost minimization and profit maximization, which means news organizations must depend on elites and government sources for coverage of political issues.

The general tendency of news media to focus attention on elites has been hypothesized and to a great extent documented in a number of scientific studies. For example, Gans (1979) estimated that the principal actor in about 75 to 80 percent of domestic on U.S. news media was a well-known or important individual. In the realm of international affairs, the President of the United States is the single most important newsmaker in the eyes of major media, followed by the Secretary of State and certain other high government officials or members of Congress.

The press dependence on government sources seems more apparent in foreign policy issues. Cohen in his classic book *The Press and Foreign Policy* (1963) described the news media role in the international arena as "a sort of intelligent agent to the political process." Cohen rejected the mirror metaphor which suggests that the press holds up a mirror in which its readers can see the world. Instead, he suggested that foreign news comes out of an interplay between policymakers and international affairs correspondents. According to Cohen's view, foreign policy originates in the Executive branch of government, somewhere in the White House, the Department of State, or the Department of Defense. From the Executive branch it moves to the press, or is picked up by the press, which has the task of reporting it to the public. As Cohen wrote (p. 268):

In the framework of government and politics in Washington, as in the larger political system, the press is a useful handmaiden in the competition over policies. For this is the place where direct political support is needed if one view of policy rather than another is to prevail; and all the reasons that send men to the press in the search for general public support would seem to be even more compelling in this political arena.

Many researchers who examined the relationship between the press and the government also share Cohen's observations and point out that the government is basically the root (and quite often the only authoritative) source of information concerning U.S. foreign relations and international politics. News leaks, whether deliberate or accidental, can supply the first hint of any policy design in progress. "More than in any other area of news gathering," Becker (1977, p. 364) has observed, the news media are "dependent on governmental sources to provide focus for and information about world events."

In one way or another, these governmental information-giving sources, both formal and informal, tend to affect how, when, and where foreign policy issues are to be presented and interpreted in the press. By using different techniques either to highlight or to downplay the importance of certain issues or even totally ignore their existence, the government is likely to set the agenda for the press to follow in their daily reporting of foreign affairs (Allison, 1971).

At best, news reporting on foreign countries is mostly supplemental to official efforts. Consequently, the press becomes an instrument through which the government can transmit messages to the public. As Chang (1993) has noted, the press tends to be supportive of the government in foreign policy issues and it acts as "a surrogate for foreign policymakers, than an independent voice for alternative views." According to Kern (1981), reporters view foreign affairs "through the White House lens." Therefore, in the arena of foreign policy, the government can frequently count on the American-based press to rally round the flag whenever the situation calls for such support.

In this regard, Storey's (1983) study on the relationship between presidential news conferences and network news broadcasts is illustrative. Using published transcripts of sampled presidential news conferences and the *Television News Index and Abstracts*, Storey compared international issues as treated in the press conferences and on U.S. network television's early evening broadcasts. From his study, Storey found that there was a positive relationship between presidential emphasis on international issues in news conferences and their coverage on network television news. Although geographical focus of presidential discussion shifted from Vietnam and Indochina during the Nixon and Ford administrations to Egypt, Israel and the Middle East for President Carter, and toward

more emphasis on the Soviet Union with President Reagan, the general tenor of presidential comments showed consistency across the four presidencies. In fact, Storey's findings lend empirical support to the notion that the president and the media tend to view foreign affairs from a common perspective and more often in a collaborative than an adversary role.

Whatever the level of contact, the integration or cooperation among foreign affairs journalists and political elites is high and significant, as James Reston explains in his book *The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on American Foreign Policy* (1966, p. 64). He wrote that people who write news "are usually dealing with news as the post office delivers the mail, and when officials and reporters perform this cooperative service, which is what they do most of the time, they are undoubtedly an influential combination."

According to some critics, the collaboration between the press and government became readily apparent in the Gulf War coverage. For example, Kellner (1992, p. 1) stresses that during the war, mainstream media served as "cheerleaders and boosters for the Bush administration and Pentagon war policy, invariably putting the government "spin" on information and events concerning the war." The media helped mobilize public support for U.S. war policy and promoted euphoric celebration of the war as a great triumph for U.S. technology, leadership, and military power.

Associated Press foreign correspondent Mort Rosenblum in his book *Who Stole the News?* (1993, p.11) gives another compelling example:

Most editors, without their own agenda, follow Washington's. When Saddam [Hussein, President of Iraq] was still a U.S. ally against Iran, Mohammar Khadafy of Libya was monster of the month. Then, U.S. warplanes helped the French stop him from invading Chad, described as vital to American interests. In August 1990, Libya dropped off the planet. While American troops hurried to protect

Saudi Arabia, Khadafy's proxy rebels rolled unopposed into Chad. This was noted in a few paragraphs inside the New York Times and hardly anywhere else.

Dorman and Farhang (1987), in their analysis of press coverage of Iran by the prestige mainstream media, also found that American news media often followed the cues of foreign policymakers rather than exercising independent judgment in reporting political life in Iran. Indeed, journalists proved easily susceptible to ethnocentrism, a condition that served the policy goals of official Washington. From these findings they argued that the press, far from fulfilling the watchdog role assigned it in democratic theory, is deferential rather than adversarial in the foreign policy arena.

One theoretical perspective relevant to the study of the role of the press in coverage of foreign countries is that of agenda-setting, first introduced by Cohen in 1960. The agenda-setting hypothesis says that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (Cohen, 1960). Within the agenda-setting framework, the press agenda is likely to be shaped by the source agenda (Chang, 1993).

This means that the press may identify foreign policy and international conflicts through the perspectives of official Washington. As Weiss (1974) has stressed, for most issues, especially foreign policy affairs, the press acts as a surrogate observer for the public at large and performs an important function: creation of external reality for the audience. As a major information source, the press certainly brings what government is thinking and doing in foreign affairs to the public. To use White's (1973, p. 327) words, "No major act of the American Congress, no foreign adventure, no act of diplomacy, no

great social reform, can succeed in the United States unless the press prepares the public mind."

In Cohen's view (1963), those who draw the political map of the world for most of us are reporters and editors. Presumably, how the public perceives the world out there is to be determined by the journalists who see and describe it.

As Pollock (1981) has pointed out major news media play a crucial role in setting foreign affairs agendas for public discussion because: "(a) they affect foreign government perceptions of our foreign policy; (b) they set standards for foreign coverage by other media outlets throughout the United States and (c) they constitute an almost unchallengable source of information on foreign affairs for most U.S. citizens."

The agenda-setting role of American media, as for most other Western media, has come under increasing scrutiny in the "New World Communication Order" critique advanced by the Third World analysts (Somavia, 1976; Boyd-Barrett, 1980). "New World Communication Order" is a broad concept, encompassing such issues as new communication technologies, transborder data flow, inequities in the flow of information, ownership and control of communication industries, rights and responsibilities of journalists, and the cultural impact of communication. Proponents of this concept have argued that American media tend to serve ideological doctrines of the West by projecting a negative image about events in developing countries of the Third World, while at the same time emphasizing much more that is positive in their coverage of the industrialized nations. It has been stated that the media focus more exclusively than they ought to on wars, other crises, and disasters in the Third World. The application of present news values and newsgathering practices results in what is termed the "coups and earthquakes"

syndrome (Rosenblum, 1979). In addition, critics have suggested that much coverage from developing nations is oversimplified or cast in a East-West perspective (Elliott and Golding, 1974).

In fact, Masmoudi (1978), in his seminal paper on "Third World Information Order," deplores the lack of information on developing countries in transnational media, and asserts that when media do indeed show an interest in them, they do so "in the most unfavorable light, stressing crises, strikes, street demonstrations, punches, etc., or even holding them up to ridicule." The criteria governing selection of news, says Masmoudi, are "based on the political and economic interests of the transnational system and of the world in which the system is established."

A monograph on "The World of News Agencies" prepared for the International Commission for Communications Problems (El-Oteifi, 1978), concludes that "in general terms the Third World and actors in the Third World are presented sketchily, particularly in comparison with Western areas of the world and Western actors." In fact, one member of the Commission, El-Oteifi of Egypt (1978, pp. 3-4), noted that developing countries are especially critical of international press agencies "because they do not provide sufficient coverage of events that take place outside the Western world, and only present events in the Third World that are sensational or exotic, or that tend to undermine the developing countries."

The problem of qualitative imbalances in media coverage of the Third World was articulated as follows by Narinder Aggarwala (1981), a prominent spokesman for the interests of developing countries:

The general public in the West gets to look at world events through the prism of their media. In the developing countries also, people come to see their own world through the eyes of the Western media. Quite often, the media transmit single-dimensional, fractured images perceived by viewers as reflections of the whole. Partly this is due to the nature of the craft and partly due to an overemphasis on spot or action news in international news dissemination systems. Western media leaders insist that noncrisis news is of little interest to the general public. But news is what happens, and the most important thing happening in the Third World today is the struggle for economic and social change. It is imperative for the survival of a free press that journalists and media leaders find ways to cover development news interestingly and adequately (Aggarwala, 1981, p. xix).

Giffard (1983, p. 19) in his analysis of news flow in U.S. wire services, also found that "the composite portrait of the developing countries that emerges depicts them as being relatively more prone to internal conflicts and crises; more likely to be the setting of armed conflict; more frequently the recipients of disaster relief; and proportionately more often the location of criminal activities."

Larson's (1984) findings from his study on international coverage on the U.S. networks provide another data set of empirical evidence supporting the notion that there are significant qualitative as well as quantitative imbalances in coverage of developing countries as compared with developed nations of the world. Examining international coverage during the 1972-1981 decade, Larson found that the U.S. broadcast networks devoted more of their own resources to coverage of developed and socialist nations than to coverage from the Third World. According to Larson, "it is apparent that the U.S. networks tend to cover developments in the Third World most often when they involve the United States or other developed nations." Larson also suggested that there is proportionately more crisis coverage from the Third World than from either developed or socialist nations. Furthermore, in terms of independent newsgathering efforts by the network organization, developing nations "receive an even lower priority." As Larson put

it. "When the networks do dispatch their own correspondents to cover events in the Third World, as often as not it will be in response to an ongoing or breaking crisis" (Larson, 1984, pp. 109-112).

On the whole, findings from these studies suggest that coverage of foreign and international news in the American news media tends to be determined primarily by U.S. involvement and national interests. In fact, the presentations and interpretations of foreign policy affairs are generally supportive of the views held by policymakers. Even in the case of Vietnam, media for the most part reported favorably on U.S. military issues until events on the ground and dissent at home undermined official pronouncements. American journalists, whether realizing or not, tend to act as ad hoc players, relying mostly on official sources for clues to and interpretations of the political situation abroad. At the same time, there is reason to assume that agenda of the press in international coverage is basically affected by ideological doctrines of the West-East relationship.

The research undertaken for this thesis should clarify whether, in portraying the republic of Uzbekistan, American journalists tend to apply criteria that correspond with American foreign policy. Resting on above-mentioned scientific evidence the current study tests two main hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Members of the American elite press tend to view Uzbekistan through an ideological prism set by official Washington.

Hypothesis 2: The press attitude toward Uzbekistan during the post-1991 period should be generally negative, with an emphasis on battle, crisis and conflict.

These hypotheses conform to both the interdependence and agenda-setting theories by tracking the source agenda influences the major press agenda, particularly

when the sources are American policymakers. Interestingly, scholars are also beginning to argue that agenda-setting influences not only what to report about but also on how to interpret certain issues and events.

In addition, the case study addresses the following questions:

1. How much attention did major American media pay to Uzbekistan between 1991-1996?
2. What is the symbolic representation of the government of Uzbekistan in press coverage?
3. What assumptions influenced journalists' views of this Central Asian nation?

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODS: CASE STUDY AND CONTENT ANALYSIS

The research questions presented require an explanatory approach. Several methods have been used to explore the interplay between American foreign policy and the press coverage of international news. While some studies use interviews to determine interactions and perceptions between reporters and policy officials, most research employs content analysis to examine presentations and interpretations of foreign policy issues in the news media.

Research using interviews was done by Cohen (1963), Batscha (1975), Nimmo (1964), Chittick (1970), and Linsky (1986). Based on interviews with foreign policy officials and the reporters who cover the Executive branch offices, these studies suggested that in their daily interactions with policy officials, reporters often consider themselves to be independent actors and active participants in the foreign policymaking process.

The content analysis method has been widely applied to investigate the press coverage of numerous countries and regions, including Central and South America (Berry, 1990), China (Lin & Salwen, 1986; Chang 1993), Cuba (Berry, 1990; Cozean 1979), India (Lynch & Effendi 1964, Ramaprasad & Riffe, 1987), Iran (Kanso & Nelson, 1993; Berry, 1990; Dorman & Farhang, 1987), Japan (Cohen, 1957), Korea (Osmer, 1980), Pakistan (Becker, 1977), and the Soviet Union (Kriesberg, 1946).

A case study and content analysis are the research strategies used in this thesis to answer the research questions comparing press reports of Uzbekistan and U.S. government policy toward the country. The case study strategy has a distinct advantage

over other strategies when "a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control." (Yin, 1989, p. 20).

"The essence of a case study, the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result." (Yin, 1989, p. 23)

As Krippendorff (1980) defined, content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context." The term data refers to messages or symbolic communications which, according to Danielson (1963) contain "a remarkably concentrated expression of some of the major factors involved in communication" that have potential effects.

Conduct of the Research

Two sets of data are used in the study: U.S. press content and government documents.

The press: The case study is based on the content analysis of three American elite newspapers: The New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times. These three newspapers were chosen because of their extensive coverage of foreign policy issues as well as because of their prominence and influence on the public mind. In fact, they are widely read by policymakers, the attentive public, journalists and the diplomatic community (Cohen, 1960; Davison, 1976). For example, the New York Times is considered to "end up influencing the content" of other mass media (Gitlin, 1980) and also an "indicator of the general thrust of news" that reaches the U.S. citizenry (Page & Shapiro, 1984). At the same time, examination of these elite newspapers would offer

better evidence testing the hypotheses and research questions than would scrutiny of other newspapers that usually cover fewer foreign policy issues.

In the analysis, these three newspapers were combined to examine overall news reporting about events in Uzbekistan. The study period covered five years, from September 1, 1991, when Uzbekistan proclaimed its political independence, through December 31, 1996. From 1991 through 1996, all news stories and editorials in the three newspapers were considered. They were collected from the LEXIS-NEXIS data base by examining the following key words individually and in combination: "Uzbekistan," "Central Asia," and "Karimov." In stories dealing with the broader topic of Central Asia, only paragraphs featuring direct references to Uzbekistan are reported here. "Karimov" is utilized because Islam Karimov has ruled the republic since 1989. He was elected as the president of Uzbekistan in the first national elections held in December 29, 1991. Indeed, Karimov has been mentioned or cited in most political stories of Uzbekistan by reporters of the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times.

Government documents: The government documents researched for this thesis included the nonduplicated items released by the White House and the State Department such as announcements, public speeches, agreements, messages to the Congress, and other materials. As extramedia data, the government documents represent what actually happened in the six-year history of American-Uzbek relations and could be used "as variables, the relations of which to other variables are to be tested" (Rosengren, 1970). From historical perspective, the official documents provide the necessary contexts in which the press coverage of Uzbekistan can be examined.

Coding and Measurement

Along with the whole item, each paragraph of the story was also the coding and analysis unit. The paragraph provides a more precise content of issues dealt in the press. Another reason for using the paragraph as the unit of coding is that in many cases Uzbekistan was covered either as part of the former Soviet Union or as part of Central Asia. Thus to be included for recording, a paragraph had to be related to Uzbekistan. Otherwise, the paragraph was not considered.

Since the number of stories of Uzbekistan published in the mainstream press during five years comprised 75, and the number of paragraphs analyzed totaled 645, a computerized coding system was applied in addition to sheet coding. Given the limited number of stories, intercoder reliability was 0.94.

The strength of the computerized procedure is that under optimal conditions it can save time and provide highly reliable coding (Stempel, 1989). In fact, the computer is valuable for a study that involves recognition of words or even syllables. A good example of efficient use of the computer is Anderson's research on the problem of information control. Anderson (1971) constructed a set of key words to identify what news stories were about, which allowed for comparisons of news coverage by different sources.

Using identical coding procedures and categories for the newspapers, each article was coded based on the following variables:

1. Perception of Uzbekistan. Perception was defined as a description or an impression of Uzbekistan. The direction of these variables was based on a 3-point scale, ranging from negative or unfavorable, with a score of 1, to positive or favorable, with a score of 3. A score of 2 was assigned as neutral. News or opinions depicting Uzbekistan

as despotic, totalitarian, unstable, undesirable and the like were considered as negative and received a score of 1. If the article depicted Uzbekistan as friendly, open, peace-loving, stable, promising and the like, it was coded as positive, with a score of 3. Articles indicating no clear perceptions were coded as neutral.

2. Symbols of Uzbekistan. A symbol was defined as a word or phrase used to represent Uzbekistan and its government. As Pool (1970) stated, "words are symbols because they stand for the attitudes of those who use them." Although symbols are not static, many appear to have common appeals to the general public toward a certain issue. For example, for most Americans the symbol "Communist" is related to "oppression, totalitarianism, or other negative terms (Cobb & Elder, 1972). Since this research is partly intended to explore the extent of negativism in the press coverage of Uzbekistan, ideological symbols such as "Communist," "Totalitarian," "Ex-Soviet" and "Authoritarian" were selected.

3. Subject of articles. This covered the kind of issues or events the article was mainly about. The preliminary literature review allowed the coder to choose the following categories of issues: government, human rights, military and war, economy, culture, welfare, and other issues.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

U.S. Policy Toward Uzbekistan

With the collapse of the USSR, U.S. policymakers found themselves dealing with the leaders of 15 different states, rather than just one. The policy of the United States toward the Soviet successor states has sought to foster democracy, strengthen free markets, and enhance security by containing and shrinking the stockpile of nuclear weapons.

However, certain republics have been deemed to be of greater interest to the American policy community than are others. U.S. foreign policymakers have decided that U.S. strategic interests are more affected by events in Russia than they are by those in any other new states. To date, the United States has treated Central Asia as an afterthought. Thus, Uzbekistan has not been an arena of primary concern to U.S. policymakers who from the beginning have expressed doubts that America would be able to make huge inroads in building democratic societies in this region.

As Graham Fuller (1994), senior scientist at the RAND Corporation and a former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council (NIC), has defined them, American national interests in Central Asia "are quite limited and primarily "negative" in character." According to Fuller, the United States has been focusing on: (1) preventing the reemergence of "Russian radical or ideological expansionism," which could re-create global nuclear confrontation; (2) limiting unrest which could cause civil war or further breakup of nations; (3) avoiding nuclear proliferation; (4) restricting the development of radical anti-western forms of political Islam; (5) supporting the spread of democracy and

human rights; and (6) enabling the United States to have a role in the economic development of the region, especially its raw materials.

The relations between the United States and Uzbekistan during the last six years can be described as a "winding path." Official Washington generally resisted recognizing the movement of Uzbekistan toward independence until December 1991 when nationhood was a *fait accompli*. However, the economic and political survival of this nation remained a great question mark in the view of the West. The first diplomatic relations began after an official visit by Secretary of State James Baker to Uzbekistan in February 1992. On this trip, Baker appealed to the President Karimov to abide by a set of 10 "principles" on democracy and human rights in exchange for formal recognition of Uzbekistan from Washington.

Baker acknowledged that democracy is far from perfect in this country where "many political rights are denied." As he noted, "the U.S. has diplomatic relations with many countries -- although we disagree with their lack of political and economic freedom -- where we use those relations to push for greater economic and political reform" (New York Times, February 17, 1992).

However, further political developments in Uzbekistan demonstrated that the Uzbek government was far from prepared to implement the major principles of human rights advanced by Washington. The Uzbek authorities subsequently disappointed Washington by unleashing a campaign of persecution against opposition members. For some time, moreover, they took the liberty of treating Americans as they did local dissidents.

A number of sensational incidents (including the deportation of researcher Bill Fierman and journalist Steve Levine; and the beating of an employee of the American Embassy in Tashkent) brought a sharp response: The White House suggested that Uzbekistan should "know its place," and an Uzbek parliamentary delegation was expelled from the United States (Los Angeles Times, June 24, 1993).

U.S. State Department spokesman Michael McCurry, concerning this incident, said that "as long as U.S. employees are being harassed and beaten by the Uzbek authorities, it would be entirely inappropriate to engage in activities from which Uzbek officials would benefit" (United States. Department of State. Statements, June 18, 1993). Consequently, America canceled its other bilateral activities with Uzbekistan. U.S. ambassador-at-large Strobe Talbott cut short his trip in Uzbekistan in September, 1993 and refused to sign an aid agreement, saying that Washington would not provide economic support if there were no democratic reforms in this country (Washington Post, September 16, 1993).

As a result, U.S. investment has been modest in Uzbekistan, with the exception of very recent projects mounted by Newmont Mining, M. W. Kellogg Co., and a few others. U.S. assistance has been more limited here, too, both in general and in dealing with the democratization process. Central Asia itself remained the recipient of but a small part of U.S. assistance funds to the newly independent states (NIS): With roughly 20 percent of the total population of the NIS, Central Asia as a region has consistently received only between 10 and 13 percent of total USAID funds obligated to the NIS as a whole.

Despite that, Uzbekistan's President Karimov remained impervious to Western criticism, displaying unwillingness to change his domestic policy. During an interview

with a correspondent of *Time* magazine Karimov expressed his stand on human rights in Uzbekistan as follows:

We favor an American presence in Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a guarantor of our democratic development, but you've got to help us, rather than assuming moralistic poses. We will build democratic institutions, but keeping in mind our own special circumstances. Do you think it was possible to create other political parties in a state long-dominated by the Communist Party? We aligned ourselves by the stars atop the Kremlin, and you suddenly expect us to have a democratic state in only two years? Why should this issue become a stumbling block in relations with Uzbekistan? (*Time*, July 25, 1994).

At the same time, it became apparent that Washington could no longer ignore the importance of Uzbekistan for American political and economic interests in Asia. Rich in oil and gas, and situated in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan could serve as an important strategic partner for the United States. In addition, U.S. policymakers came to conclusion that accelerated democratization in this region may produce leaderships that are less responsive to it or- worse-may lead to the coming to power of Islamist groups. (Hunter, 1996).

Even though relations between Washington and Tashkent remained strained until late 1995, gradually the situation began to change. The first sign of improvement came when Americans were granted permission to travel freely in Uzbekistan. U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, who visited Tashkent shortly afterward, was quite pleased with the Uzbek leadership and praised Uzbekistan as "an island of stability" in Central Asia. Uzbekistan has responded in kind by being the only Central Asian country to back the U.S. embargo against the sale of Russian nuclear reactors to Iran. Then it was the turn of U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher, with whom complete mutual understanding

was reached on issues of regional security and cooperation in combating drug trafficking and international terrorism.

After that, delegations of various types of American specialists began arriving in Uzbekistan one after another. But the decisive change in U.S. attitudes toward Uzbekistan came during Islam Karimov's trip to the session of the United Nations General Assembly in October 1995, when the Uzbek President held meetings with U.S. Vice President Albert Gore and members of the Council on International Relations and finally managed to convince them of the need for a strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and the United States. It was after those meetings that Uzbekistan's foreign policy positions sharply improved, large Western loans were extended, and officials of the American administration and of various international organizations began speaking more and more of "substantial progress in the field of human rights" in Uzbekistan. Recently, U.S. Ambassador to Tashkent Stanley Escudero even repeated the Uzbek authorities' stock phrase that "there are no obstacles to the return of political émigrés."

Finally, at the end of June 1996, Islam Karimov became the only Central Asian leader to be honored with a state visit to Washington and meeting with U.S. President Bill Clinton. During this meeting, president Clinton underscored the strong U.S. interest in the independence, stability, and prosperity in Uzbekistan. On that occasion the United States opened a 400-million dollar credit line to enable Uzbekistan to develop its oil and gas reserves, while 200 U.S.-Uzbek joint ventures, notably in gold mining, have been formed (Reuters, North American Wire, June 25, 1996).

Did these political developments have an impact on press coverage of Uzbekistan? What role did American press play in U.S.-Uzbekistan relations? Did

American journalists reflect official policy with regard to Uzbekistan in their reports or did they provide alternative views? The following section deals with these questions.

Press Performance

American policy toward Uzbekistan has certainly affected the quality of press coverage. What to report and how to present Uzbekistan has been a real challenge for American journalists. Table 1 below documents that after the collapse of the Soviet Union the American mainstream press paid little attention to Uzbekistan, providing occasional and mostly fragmented coverage. In general, little coverage of Uzbekistan by American press reflects Washington's attention to this country.

Table 1. Number of News Items on Uzbekistan During Six Years

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	Total
The New York Times	2	5	8	2	2	1	20
The Washington Post	5	6	3	5	1	2	22
The Los Angeles Times	13	6	6	1	5	2	33
Total	20	17	17	8	8	5	75

As Table 1 illustrates, a total of 75 items were published during six year period in the New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times. Among them, the Los Angeles Times (which has a large Asian population) provided 33 articles, while the New York Times published just 20 and the Washington Post registered 22. Moreover, the overall number of stories about Uzbekistan has significantly decreased from 1994 through 1996 as compared with 1991-1993.

The decline in press coverage of Uzbekistan can be explained by two major factors. First, as was discussed within agenda-setting theory, American media tend to

focus on negative rather than positive news in their coverage of Third World countries. In fact, for foreign correspondents the world available for coverage has largely been defined by crisis and conflict. They seem to be preoccupied with the search of sensational or bizarre events in that part of the world. In this respect, the beginning of the 1990s has witnessed the breakup of the Soviet Union, followed by enduring battles between presidents and parliaments, struggles for geopolitical influence, separatist movements, inter-ethnic conflicts and the jostling between advocates of democracy and the defenders of national privilege. Therefore, American reporters seem to take these events as newsworthy. In contrast, the political situation in Uzbekistan was relatively stable from 1994 through 1996. No major political cataclysms that could attract reporters attention took place during that time. Consequently, the press lost its interest in this republic. In fact, the more negative events occurred in Uzbekistan, the more American press paid attention to this country.

Second, for more than four years official Washington maintained a negative attitude toward Uzbekistan's regime, pointing to the problems of democracy and human rights abuses. That policy gave the press a clear guide to interpreting U.S.-Uzbekistan policy. In other words, journalists knew what and how to report about Uzbekistan. As will be discussed further, from 1991 through 1993 most government reports and press stories dealt with disturbing political problems concerning this country. But the press seemed unable to cope with an apparent shift in the relations that came in 1995. Interestingly, all of the three elite newspapers omitted covering visits by Secretary of Defense Perry and later by Secretary of State Christopher to Uzbekistan. Moreover, none of the newspapers paid attention to Clinton's meeting with Karimov.

These findings suggest that even though the mainstream press may reflect the official attitude toward the country involved, it nevertheless has its own voice that does not change so quickly. While the press is usually quiescent on strategic matters and is willing to go along with official Washington's foreign policy consensus, the news media on occasion can be exceedingly tough with White House officials on tactical matters and can be relentless when contradictions in policy become apparent.

Table 2. Attitudes Toward Uzbekistan During 1991-1996* (N=645)

	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Total
The New York Times	75%	21%	4%	192
The Washington Post	83%	14.5%	2.5%	146
The Los Angeles Times	72%	21%	7%	407

* Entries are percentages of paragraphs in the newspapers. Paragraphs that did not deal with Uzbekistan are excluded.

As reported in Table 2, during these six years the image of Uzbekistan presented by all three newspapers turned out to be highly negative. In fact, the newspapers rarely used anything positive to describe Uzbekistan in their news and editorials. The headline of most stories clearly illustrated Uzbekistan in negative terms, depicting it as a despotic, totalitarian, authoritarian or police state. A reading of the headlines over time should make clear the persistent pattern of Uzbekistan image that prevailed in all newspapers. Some of the New York Time's headlines were as follows:

* "A Dream of One Central Asia Under Islam's Banner" (October 11, 1991)

* "Uzbek Students Riot Over Price Rises" (January 18, 1992)

* "In Nervous Uzbekistan, It's a New Day but with the Same Old Hard Line"

(February 13, 1993)

* "Asian Republic Still Caught in Web of Communism" (October 13, 1993)

* "Soviet-Style Rule in Uzbekistan Provides a Bearable Life 'If We Are Quiet'"

(April 16, 1995)

Likewise, the Washington Post indicated in its headlines that:

* "Militia Tightens Rule Over Ex-Soviet State" (January 20, 1992)

* "Ex-Leaders Rebound in Central Asia; 'Unreconstructed Soviets' Bringing Back

Strong-Arm Politics" (December 26, 1992)

* "U.S. Protests Detentions in Central Asian States; Envoy Refuses to Sign Aid

Agreement" (September 16, 1993)

* "Uzbek Dissidents Barred From Seeing Senator" (June 4, 1994)

* "Uzbekistan Cracks Down On Dissidents; Rights Groups Accuse Central Asian

Regime" (September 24, 1994)

* "Ex-Communists Win Vote in Uzbekistan" (January 5, 1995)

In the Los Angeles Times, Uzbekistan received similar treatment:

* "Kremlin Shifts Just Makes Matters Worse for Uzbeks; Soviet Union: Prices

Rise After Asian Republic Declares Independence Adding to Economic

and Ethnic Troubles" (September 21, 1991)

* "Politics as Usual for Uzbeks: Communists Stay in Power; Hard-Line Leaders

Stir Fears of Islamic Fundamentalism to Keep a Tight Grip on the Region"

(September 23, 1991)

* "Uzbek Students Die in Riots Over Price Hikes" (January 18, 1992)

* "Uzbekistan Woos US with Pledge on Rights; Central Asia: But Opposition
Leader Tells Baker that the New Nation is Still a Totalitarian Regime"
(February 10, 1992)

* "Central Asian Republics Rear a Bitter Harvest; Poverty and Hunger have
Followed Independence (September 15, 1992)

* "Communists Find Life as Born-again Bureaucrats" (August 24, 1993)

* "Ex-Soviet Republics of Central Asia Reach Into the Past to Foster Statehood"
(December 25, 1996)

It is not difficult to detect the similarities between the tone of the editorials and the labeling vocabulary used in the articles. As expected, Uzbekistan was often associated with such symbolic terms as "Communists," "Totalitarian," "Authoritarian," "Despotic," and "Police."

The agenda of democracy and human rights, as advanced in the official policy, was certainly picked up by the press. As Table 3 shows, the newspapers tended to construct the majority of news stories around the government of Uzbekistan.

Table 3. Subject Matter of Articles on Uzbekistan During Six Years, 1991-1996

Government	44%
Human Rights	28%
Military and War	11%
Economy	9%
Culture	5%
Welfare	2%
Other	1%

Most of the articles dealt with the political struggle between the government and opposition forces. The newspapers saw the problems of democracy and human rights in the personality of President Islam Karimov who has been ruling Uzbekistan since 1989. Karimov was depicted as a hard-line Communist whose regime maintained authoritarian control over the republic and silenced its critics. Examples from the New York Times illustrating this point include the following:

- * "After the coup failed, President Karimov declared the independence of Uzbekistan, a move opposition members describe as a cynical effort to preserve his authoritarian rule." (September 18, 1991)
- * "...others, like President Islam A. Karimov of Uzbekistan, determined to preserve the Stalinist political system." (October 11, 1991)
- * "...opposition leaders told Mr. Baker that their President was a dictator." (February 17, 1992)
- * "...Mr. Karimov, a former Communist party boss who originally expressed support for the August coup against the Soviet President..." (February 17, 1992)
- * "President Islam A. Karimov has sealed the border against refugees from the fighting and is increasing controls on his political opposition." (September 30, 1992)
- * "Islam Karimov is another hard-line Communist." (October 13, 1993)
- * "The Uzbek President, Islam Karimov, who recently called a Soviet-style election to keep himself in office until the year 2000, has abolished free opposition, imprisoned rivals and banished opponents." (May 7, 1995)

The Washington Post also tended to depict the Uzbek president in rather negative terms:

- * "Despite his tacit endorsement of last week's coup, Karimov has managed to avert any open challenges to his rule by striking the nationalist drum."
(September 1, 1991)
- * "Karimov, 53, a Communist Party bureaucrat, has declared he will bring change to Uzbekistan from the top down "amid order and discipline." (September 16, 1991)
- * "... of scores of people interviewed here, almost no one expressed confidence that Karimov's reforms will make a difference in daily life. Many said he simply is adopting Uzbek nationalist slogans and feigning democratic change as a way of keeping power." (September 16, 1991)
- * "Karimov is a former hard-line Communist who continues to rule with an authoritarian hand." (February 17, 1992)
- * "Karimov's government, widely regarded as the former Soviet Union's worst human rights offender, routinely has detained perceived opponents -- and also has kidnapped them from abroad." (June 4, 1994)
- * "Erika Dailey, a Human Rights Watch official based here, said the recent silence of opposition forces is not a sign of contentment, as the Uzbek government maintains, but of the "effectiveness and brutality" of its repression."
(September 24, 1994)

Much like other newspapers, The Los Angeles Times was also critical of Uzbek government:

- * "...53-year-old Karimov, who cuts the pasha-like figure common to Central Asian Communist leaders." (September 3, 1991)
- * "Although Karimov this week changed the name of the local Communist Party to the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, his hard-line style of leadership remains undiluted." (September 21, 1991)
- * "On the streets of the Uzbek capital, where Karimov critics abound, many express their distaste for him in the form of jokes." (September 21, 1991)
- * "And Communist hard-liners like Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov have managed to hang on to power by switching the basis of their legitimacy -- and public appeal -- from leftist ideology to right-wing nationalism." (January 19, 1993)
- * "Uzbekistan has particular cause to worry, with more than 1 million ethnic Tajiks, a healthy Islamic fundamentalist movement of its own and a hard-line government headed by Communist-era holdover President Islam Karimov." (January 30, 1993)
- * "Among the most blatant examples have been former Communist leaders in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics-- such as Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic and Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov--who are both trying to sustain their own careers by making fear and hate primary tools of politics." (June 8, 1993)

The thematic presentation of Uzbekistan illustrates that the official preoccupation with a limited range of topics, such as government and human rights issues apparently delimited the scope of discussion in the press. In fact, human rights problems continued

to receive high attention throughout six years, whereas economy and welfare issues got significantly little coverage. Also, the press frequently touched upon Uzbekistan's military involvement in the Tajik civil war but was much less interested in covering other issues, including ecological concerns. In fact, only one article in six years of press coverage dealt with such a global ecological problem as the Aral Sea disaster which has a negative impact on the whole Central Asian region of 60 million people (Los Angeles Times, December 24, 1996).

Human Rights and Democracy Issues as Major Agenda Items

The fact that human rights issues became major agenda in press coverage of Uzbekistan does not appear to be accidental. It is generally recognized that the United States incorporates human rights and democracy into the mainstream of its foreign policy. In this respect, Secretary of State Baker's visit to Uzbekistan in 1992 was the first official step to encourage the Uzbek government become accountable for its human rights record. During his trip, Baker got agreement from President Karimov that Uzbekistan would support democratic values and adhere to the principles of Helsinki Final Act. But, as further political developments demonstrated, Uzbekistan was not ready to meet the demands of American policymakers and failed to implement them.

Nevertheless, an analysis of government documents shows that after the breakup of the Soviet Union even U.S. policymakers doubted that Uzbekistan and other Central Asian states would be able to navigate the path to democracy. In fact, U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs in hearings held on April 28, 1992, acknowledged:

In judging foreign governments we tend to apply them criteria derived from our own history. Unfortunately, it is unrealistic to expect Central Asian states rapidly to develop into democracies. Democracy is a tender plant that has existed for only short periods of time among very limited numbers of people even in the West. At present Central Asian republics are governed essentially by the same men who ran them on behalf of Moscow. Whereas a particular leader may be overthrown or voted out, the old ruling apparat is in place and will remain in place for the foreseeable future. There is even less of an alternative to the old communist cadres in Central Asia than there is in Russia (*United States Policy Toward Central Asia*, 1992).

The Committee stressed that while the U.S. cannot expect the newly independent Central Asian republics "to provide their citizens with guarantees of human and political rights to those enjoyed by the Swiss or the Danes," the government will not disregard "outright denials of freedom of speech and press, the establishment of dictatorships, or cases of religious and ethnic persecution."

As critics have pointed out, escalation in human rights abuses in Uzbekistan coincided with several public events, suggesting that crackdown is directly linked to the governments ostensible concern that peace be maintained in the republic. Indeed, numerous members of the opposition were detained and arrested, and criminal charges were formalized, at the time of the student riots in Tashkent in January 1992. Some opposition members were arrested and detained immediately prior to the public rallies scheduled for July 2 to coincide with the opening of the Supreme Soviet session. Censorship increased in the weeks prior to the celebration of the anniversary of the independence of Uzbekistan on September 1, 1992.

Furthermore, U.S. policymakers and human rights activists continued to express their concern over problems in Central Asia, especially in Uzbekistan. For example, in 1993, Helsinki Watch (a division of Human Rights Watch) released its report on "Human

Rights in Uzbekistan" in which it condemned a series of violations by the Uzbek government. The report stressed:

To observers of the Soviet Union, the violations of human rights taking place in today's Uzbekistan are uncannily familiar. Perhaps most striking is the gulf between the governments stated and legal commitment to human rights protection, and its actual record. On the one hand, protection of human rights is enshrined in both international instruments to which the Republic of Uzbekistan is signatory and legislative acts, such as the new constitution, that were written and passed by its own legislature; on the other hand, those same rights are being violated by government officials or without government intervention (Helsinki Watch, 1993, p.1).

According to the Helsinki Watch organization, the human rights record in Uzbekistan has been characterized primarily by violations of freedom of expression. Incidents were documented in which members of political opposition, such as the Birlik (Unity) Popular Movement and the Democratic Party Erk (Freedom) who have expressed public criticism of government officials were "deprived of a wide range of human freedoms, including freedom of speech, movement and association, and freedom from cruel or inhuman treatment."

The report held sharp criticism with regard to the regime of President Karimov. "Despite numerous public expressions of eagerness to embrace international principles of human rights protection," the report emphasized, "President Karimov has displayed a lack of will to implement them in all cases." As the Helsinki Watch authors put it (1993, pp. 3-6), "The lack of will to acknowledge and rectify human right abuses being committed in the republic is most clearly reflected in the fact that although most of the abuses documented in this report have been reported to the militia and the procuracy, none has resulted in arrests." At the same time, Karimov's argument for maintaining domestic stability disturbed by the civil war in Tajikistan was denounced as "unacceptable rational

for authoritarian measures" that "no way justifies the human rights abuses being committed. . . .It is likely that the offending activities--such as holding public meetings and commenting critically about government policies," the report concluded, "would be less frequent and less strident if the country were ruled with greater respect for human rights."

Following the Helsinki Watch report, on March 25, 1993, the U.S. Government's Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (also known as the Helsinki Commission) held hearings on "The Countries of Central Asia: Problems in the Transition to Independence and Implications for the United States." This was the first hearing by the Helsinki Commission dealing exclusively with the political situation in Central Asia. The Commission put its agenda in the similar fashion:

Unfortunately, the transition to independence in some of the new countries in Central Asia is compounded by the presence of repressive regimes that insist on maintaining the old Soviet style order. With the exception of one, all the current presidents of the new Central Asian countries are former first secretaries of the Communist Party. Though the party has been officially disbanded throughout the region, its activities continue under a new name. The situation has become particularly worrisome in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan where all opposition is severely repressed (United States. Congress. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1993, p.1).

Doctor Martha Olcott, professor of political science, in her testimony rejected President Karimov's argument for stability, calling it "self-serving and inconsistent policy. . . I am very pessimistic about the capacity of Karimov to retain control indefinitely using politics of force," said Olcott. She added:

The members of his entourage and his defenders would argue that this is a cultural need, that the Uzbeks only respect power, that they are not like us. But we don't have to compare Uzbekistan to America, we can compare it to some of its other South Asian and Middle Eastern neighbors to know what happens in situations in which one group enriches themselves, even if its a fairly large elite group, and

shuts everybody else out of politics. It tends to have bad results, vis-a-vis long-term stability (United States. Congress. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1993, p. 5).

The main report on human rights in Uzbekistan presented at the hearing was by Abdumannob Pulatov, the Chairman of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Society who has himself suffered political persecution. Citing that there is no freedom of speech, freedom of expression, nor freedom of activity for independent public organizations in his country, Pulatov called upon the members of Congress to put greater pressure on the Uzbek government to stop human rights violations. According to him, American media was not so active in dealing with human rights problems in Uzbekistan:

...it's very strange what we can hear on the Uzbek service of Radio Liberty and sometimes from the Voice of America. Radio Liberty has two official correspondents in Tashkent, but there is practically no information from Radio Liberty about violations on human rights in Uzbekistan, or about political situation, about the life of opposition. Radio Liberty should give an opportunity to those people who want freedom. We cannot understand why money from American taxpayers is being used for official propaganda of the Uzbek government (United States. Congress. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1993, p. 16).

It is worthy to mention that Abumannob Pulatov himself was a central figure in coverage of human rights issues by the American press and he was often mentioned or cited in stories of Uzbekistan.

The examination of State Department reports on Uzbekistan throughout the six years also illustrate that the country and its government was negatively judged by American officials based upon Uzbekistan's human rights problems and slow pace of democratic reforms. For example, the 1993 State Department report on human rights in Uzbekistan stressed:

Little progress has been made in transition from Uzbekistan's authoritarian Soviet legacy toward a more pluralistic democracy. Political life is dominated by President Islam Karimov and the highly centralized executive branch which serves him. The National Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (NDPU) is the dominant party, in many respects the successor to the former Communist party, and it is controlled by the President. Only one other party, the Fatherland Progress Party, is legally registered. It was created by a presidential advisor, apparently to give the semblance of a multiparty system. The Government continued severely to repress genuine opposition parties and movements, despite its frequently stated commitment to multiparty democracy. It justifies its repressive policy by invoking the specter of Islamic fundamentalism and the civil strife that has plagued neighboring Tajikistan (United States. Department of State, 1994, pp. 1137-1145).

As the report emphasized, security forces frequently detained or arrested opposition activists on "trumped-up charges." In 1993, the government of Uzbekistan tried two political dissidents on charges of insulting the President's honor. A poetess, Vasilya Inayatova, was found guilty in February of insulting the President through publication of a poem, "A Last Letter to the President," which expressed her anguish about political violence. She was sentenced to two years in prison but then granted amnesty under a presidential decree. Abdumannob Pulatov, chairman of the Human Rights Association, was tried on the same charge based on his purported involvement in making a poster insulting to the President which was used in a student riots in January 1992. Pulatov was found guilty and sentenced to three years in prison but also freed on amnesty.

The State Department report also sharply criticized the government of Uzbekistan for its unwillingness to foster democratic reforms in the political arena:

The Government has sought to control the political process through widespread repression as well as legal requirements that all political parties and movements register. Restrictions on public meetings and government control of information reinforced this central political control. Parliamentary election have been announced for 1994, but the Government shows no intention of allowing truly free and fair multiparty elections (United States. Department of State, 1994, pp. 1137-1145).

In sum, the State Department reports on Uzbekistan during the early 1990s, as proved true of other federal government documents issued during this period, were negative in character, though some favorable comments began appearing in the later releases when the relations between the U.S and Uzbekistan were significantly improved. For example, the 1995 State Department human rights report begins by acknowledging that "Four years after declaring independence Uzbekistan has made some progress in the transition from its authoritarian legacy towards democracy," (United States. Department of State, 1996, pp. 1110-1117) while the 1996 State Department human rights report on Uzbekistan stresses:

The Government took several steps to improve its international human rights image. President Karimov has made speeches calling for human rights reform and more press freedoms. During the summer, the Government released approximately 15 prisoners alleged to be held for political reasons. It permitted Human Rights Watch/Helsinki to open an office in Tashkent and invited exiled opposition leaders and human rights activists to return without fear of reprisal. Outspoken human rights activist Abdumannob Pulat, chairman of the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan, visited Uzbekistan without incident. At a human rights conference in September, several government critics voiced their complaints about human rights abuses before an international audience in Tashkent (United States. Department of State, 1997, pp. 1211-1220).

The agenda of democracy and human rights advanced by U.S. policymakers apparently prompted the mainstream press to focus more often on these issues. There was striking similarity between opinions and views of U.S. policymakers on human rights in Uzbekistan and presentation and judgment of this issue in the press. It is important to

note that American journalists mostly contributed to democracy and human rights issues by providing opinions of opposition members and dissidents in their stories. Those sources were cited or interviewed in order to present the Uzbek government in a negative light or to lay emphasis on existing violations of human rights in the republic. When Uzbekistan proclaimed its independence, the Washington Post wrote:

Opposition leaders here in Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, said they fear Karimov is attempting to use the independence issue as a means of consolidating his power and preparing for authoritarian rule. They note that authorities prevented an opposition group, Birlik, from holding a demonstration last Monday in support of Yeltsin (Washington Post, September 1, 1991).

A similar warning appeared on the Los Angeles Times:

Abdusrashid Sharif, spokesman for the Birlik opposition movement in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, said that, although independence should gladden activists' hearts, it has them worried. "We don't know if independence will bring us what it usually brings to people," Sharif said. "It looks like instead of the yoke of the center we'll have even worse things -- the yoke of the local khans, perhaps an attack on democracy, open dictatorship" (Los Angeles Times, September 1, 1991).

The argument that independence brought more problems rather than created new opportunities for the country, with the Uzbek leaders resorting to slogans of sovereignty to keep themselves in power, was clearly articulated in one of the first depth reports on Uzbekistan published in the New York Times on September 18, 1991. The article written by correspondent Edward Gargan is headlined as "Some Changes in Soviet Asia, But the Style is Still the Same" and it is illustrative in terms of journalists tendency to put their agenda in presenting sources. The story begins with a tragic tone: "Vladimir Dubrovsky, a giant bear of a Russian, crossed his arms over his chest and shook his head. "You see," he said, gesturing at pedestrians hurrying by, "nobody is smiling. Nobody smiles anymore." Then the correspondent states:

In deference to current fashion, the Communist Party here changed its name to the Popular Democratic Party of Uzbekistan last Saturday, but many people here say it remains unchanged in its spirit and intentions under its President, who initially supported the coup plotters. Not surprising to many, the newly named party neatly appropriated all Communist Party property. The statue of Feliks Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the K.G.B., was hauled down, but campaigners for change are still being arrested here in a crackdown on the Government's opponents (New York Times, September 18, 1991).

Opinions of several opposition members are presented in the story to stress that no major changes have taken place since independence, with the current government only trying to preserve an old Soviet-style regime. For example:

"We don't know what will happen now," says Nizaif Timur, a local journalist. "Everything is a mess. The party is still in charge, but nobody wants the party anymore. It's a boiling kettle."

Next comes Abdurahim Pulatov, a leader of opposition movement Birlik stating:

"We wanted to show that there were people who supported democracy here. But the meeting was prohibited. The Communists were afraid of the people's initiative."

"They were afraid of Yeltsin," Miralim Adilov, a lawyer and leading Birlik figure, adds,

referring to President Boris Yeltsin of the Russian republic, who defied the coup plotters:

"When the coup was defeated, the Government decided the best way to save itself was to declare independence. The party will change its name, but it won't matter" (New York Times, September 18, 1991).

Imposing the agenda of democracy by presenting opinions and views of sources arrayed against the Uzbek government was the typical method used in many other press stories of Uzbekistan. Moreover, the mainstream press seemed to be ready for any opportunity to mention problems, crisis or ethnic tensions that occurred after independence. When the student riots took place in Tashkent on January 16-17, 1992, all of the three newspapers presented accounts which drew upon the Russian news agency

Interfax. The New York Times wrote (January 18, 1992): "The rioting, which began Thursday night in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, was the worst violence reported since the former Soviet republics began introducing free-market changes." In its reports, the Washington Post (January 20, 1992) emphasized that "Elsewhere in the former Soviet orbit, political pressure mounted on the president of the Central Asian republic of Uzbekistan to resign following suppression of riots over soaring food prices last Thursday that left six students dead."

Actually, the Washington Post's story was seriously flawed in that it misreported the number of dead people as six instead of two. In this respect, the Los Angeles Times proved more accurate in stating that, "Thousands of students enraged by soaring prices and empty bread shops smashed windows, overturned cars and battled police in a Central Asian city, authorities said Friday. Two students were reportedly killed, and several were wounded" (Los Angeles Times, January 18, 1992).

Interestingly, many of the press stories were also quite similar to government documents and Helsinki Watch reports in their presentation of human rights abuses in Uzbekistan. However, there were some cases of inaccurate reporting on this issue by foreign correspondents. For example, the New York Times wrote:

On Dec. 10, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Birlik's co-chairman, Adurakhim Pulatov, was arrested with two colleagues, reportedly by the Uzbek Interior Ministry police, at a human-rights conference he organized. The President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar A. Akayev, who met Mr. Pulatov the day before, expressed his displeasure with the Uzbek action. Mr. Pulatov is said to be still in jail (New York Times, January 10, 1993).

Similarly, the Washington Post stressed that:

Even the Kirgizstan government, often praised for liberal political policies, has not objected to the Dec. 8 arrest of Uzbekistan opposition leader Abdurrahim Pulatov, which took place at a human rights conference in the Kirgiz capital, Bishkek. "As far as we know, no major human rights figure has been arrested like this anywhere in the former Soviet Union in at least two or three years," said Micah Naftalin, director of the Washington-based Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, who was present at the conference at which Pulatov was arrested (Washington Post, December 29, 1992).

The problem of these two similar reports is that they incorrectly identified the Uzbek human rights leader arrested in Kirgizstan. He was not Abdurakhim Pulatov, co-chairman of the opposition movement Birlik, as the newspapers reported, but his brother, Abdumannob Pulatov, chairman of the Uzbek Human Rights Society. Although the New York Times later acknowledged this mistake, these errors indicate that the press often provided news on Uzbekistan not directly from its own foreign correspondents but via second-hand information taken from Russian news agencies in Moscow.

At times, journalists tended to serve as intermediators between opposition members and U.S. officials, promoting their views on political life in this Central Asian state. It is not uncommon to find U.S. policymakers mentioned along with outspoken dissidents, seeking support from outside. During James Baker's visit to Uzbekistan in February 1992, the New York Times wrote that:

Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d got a lesson in the complexities of Central Asian politics today when Uzbekistan's President told Mr. Baker that he was now a real democrat ready for relations with Washington, and opposition leaders told Mr. Baker that their President was a dictator.

As the newspaper further put it:

Abdul Rakhman Pulatov, one of four opposition leaders with whom Mr. Baker met, also argued that it was now time for the United States to establish an embassy in Uzbekistan, but he spoke of different reasons than President Karimov did. "I think that the sooner diplomatic relations are established, the better it will be for those forces that do not have democratic freedoms," said Mr. Pulatov, who

heads a group called Birlik, or Unity, a populist Uzbek nationalist movement. "Politically we have no freedom at all, although officially we are registered. The totalitarian regime has been destroyed in Moscow, but in Tashkent it continues to exist" (New York Times, February 13, 1992).

At the same time, when U.S. ambassador-at-large Strobe Talbott visited Tashkent in September 1993, the Washington Post indicated that:

In Tashkent, the Uzbek capital, Talbott was able to meet with several dissidents in the U.S. Embassy on Monday, and he did not cut his trip short, contrary to earlier news reports. But several invited guests did not appear, the U.S. official said.

It was later learned that one dissident, opposition leader Otanazar Aripov, had been visited by his former jailer, who strongly encouraged Aripov not to attend. Aripov, who was in prison from last December until Aug. 6 for allegedly seeking to overthrow the government, also found two police vehicles parked outside his home. Another invited guest was detained by police on her way to the meeting. Human rights activists here said they believe those detained also include Shukhrat Ismatullayev, the co-chairman of the Birlik Popular Movement, a leading opposition group (Washington Post, September 16, 1993).

In addition, the Washington Post also presented opinions of Helsinki Watch observers on human rights situation in Uzbekistan:

Erika Dailey, a research associate for the human rights monitoring group Helsinki Watch in New York, said the detentions this week are "clearly part of a continuing pattern of abuse to silence people who freely express dissenting opinions." She said dissidents have been detained, arrested or beaten up several previous occasions when foreign officials or human rights activists were visiting. "There is no free speech in Uzbekistan," Dailey said. "There is heavy censorship and a brutal crackdown against people who speak their minds" (Washington Post, September 16, 1993).

Another illustrative example of how U.S. officials or members of special interest groups played a leading role in shaping news coverage of Uzbekistan by providing their political views is found in the article "Uzbek Dissidents Barred From Seeing Senator; Specter Protests Ex-Soviet Republic's Detention of Two Key Opposition Activists" published in the Washington Post on June 4, 1994. This article can be described as

one-source story since it is based only on the judgment of a U.S. official who visited Uzbekistan to meet with opposition leaders.

As the first paragraph of the story states, "Uzbek authorities arrested two key opposition figures this week before they were to meet with Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), who said the ex-Soviet republic's "deliberate pattern" of repression could threaten relations with Washington." According to the newspaper, Specter "was absolutely not satisfied with an official response by President Islam Karimov about the detention of the two women." Indeed, the story conveys the impression that the newspaper tended to apply a one-sided approach in the presentation of sources, emphasizing Specter's opinion and omitting arguments of Uzbek officials on this incident. A reading of the following consecutive paragraphs makes this pattern clear:

Specter said that he was scheduled to meet the women for breakfast at the home of U.S. Ambassador Henry Clarke but that drivers sent for them returned without passengers. A third, little-known opposition figure, Ibrahim Buriyev, reached the meeting.

In a letter to Karimov, released to reporters by the U.S. Embassy, Specter said: "I protest this interference with the rights of Uzbekistan citizens to meet with me and my rights to meet with them... The denial of normal contacts between individuals of our two countries creates a serious obstacle to closer relations."

In a news conference, Specter noted that the Uzbek government also had detained opposition figures who were to meet Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott and Carter-era national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in separate visits late last year.

"It is a deliberate pattern," Specter said, "and it is the pattern that is of great importance" (Washington Post, September 24, 1994).

Such news presentation seems to suggest that by highlighting the importance of human rights and downplaying other issues, governmental information-giving sources are likely to set the agenda for the press to follow in their occasional reporting of Uzbekistan.

The preoccupation with the problems of democracy and human rights in Uzbekistan at times led journalists to misjudge objective conditions and make generalizations that had no factual evidence (see, for example, the story appearing in the New York Times, February 13, 1993).

There were some reports that contained mostly journalists subjective perceptions. The New York Times went to extremes, reporting in one of its stories (February 15, 1993) that in Uzbekistan "open repression is the order of the day" and indeed it is a country where "it's not God who rules, but money." However, the newspaper did not provide any significant evidence to prove such a sharp statement.

Describing the Central Asian republics the newspaper stressed: "One thing they share is an increasingly evident lawlessness. Drugs have become the biggest cash crop in neighboring Afghanistan-- and the only way to get it to consumers is through Central Asia, which has become the route of choice for some of the world's biggest opium smugglers" (New York Times, May 7, 1995). This was echoed by the Washington Post (September 24, 1994) which reported that "There are so many violations of human rights that its fair now to call Uzbekistan a criminal state."

The results from the content analysis of the three elite American newspapers confirm that the press mostly followed political cues and the strongly negative official line held by policymakers toward Uzbekistan. More often than not, the American government was successful in relaying a vision about what was really important about this Central Asian state.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

On the whole, the six years of U.S.-Uzbekistan relations clearly demonstrated that economic and political interests of America are major determinants that define the rules of the game. When Uzbekistan was weak and its future uncertain, Washington tended to ignore this country, pointing to its human rights problems. As Uzbekistan proved to be a stable and economically perspective country that could contribute to U.S. political and economic interests, Washington's attitude radically changed and the White House found it possible to promote relations with the "totalitarian country."

The United States policy towards Uzbekistan had a profound impact on press coverage. In fact, findings from this study indicate that the picture of Uzbekistan as well as its government presented in the leading U.S. newspapers was not an independent one. The agenda of democracy and human rights advanced by U.S. policymakers apparently prompted the press to focus more on these issues, while overlooking other topics. Whether willing or not, reporters for the most part became a conduit for American officials charged with foreign policy in the region. When media did pay attention to Uzbekistan they did so in ways that created a view of the country and its fortunes that was strikingly similar to the one offered by Washington.

Future studies should look more closely at these issues and attempt to refine applicable theories, particularly in relation to examples where U.S. authorities lost control of news coverage (including instances such as Vietnam and China where a wider range of viewpoints have appeared). The role of corporate interests in shaping coverage could also be analyzed in developing countries such as Uzbekistan.

Democracy creates breathing room for society to develop apart from the state and affords individuals and communities the greatest opportunities for growth. Press efforts to promote freedom of expression for the people of Uzbekistan and aid its transition to a democratic country are certainly welcome, but should be labeled as advocacy rather than news.

In their assessments of political situation in Uzbekistan, journalists often failed to understand the complexities of the transition period. The republic, which has been under a totalitarian regime for many centuries, was increasingly but perhaps inaccurately judged by Western standards of democracy. Uzbekistan, as was true of other former Soviet republics, did not have any democratic experience before independence, nor was it ready to accept democratic reforms after independence. Simply put, the republic was going through political, economic, and social crises which invited strong-arm tactics and centralized executive authority. It is also necessary to acknowledge the republic's future political choices were clouded by the presence of divergent Western and Islamic cultures and their often conflicting political models.

Unfortunately, journalists tended to construct news frames that contributed importantly to misperceptions of enormous significance. Caught up in the assumptions of dominant ideology, news workers seem to have been conditioned to look at politics in Uzbekistan from only a liberal context. Their stories confused preferences for such a politics with the idea of politics itself. This perceptual flaw led to a denial of the legitimacy of politics in Uzbekistan, because like many Third World states Uzbekistan's politics do not have democratic orientation. A lack of historical and cultural knowledge about Central Asia did not assist journalists in providing a more coherent view of this

post-colonial events. The main flaw exhibited by journalists assigned to the region lies in their inability or unwillingness to take into consideration these factors.

The kinds of news accounts documented in this thesis certainly helped create a incomplete image of Uzbekistan. Indeed, whenever American press looked at Uzbekistan, it saw only problems and pitfalls of the old system; it did not find new achievements and improvements brought by independence. The press emphasized the shortages of the country's present but overlooked future prospects as the citizens of Uzbekistan struggled to build an independent future out of the ruins of Soviet empire. The failure of the press to provide a more coherent view during the period under review did very little to end ignorance by either the general or the attentive public about the country.

In this respect, it is appropriate to cite Dorman and Farhang's (1987, pp. 204-205) observation in regard with the role of the press in foreign policy arena:

The American news media for some varied and complicated reasons since the inception of the cold war have projected foreign politics through an ideological lens ground by official Washington, which has given a distorted view of the world to the American public. News bias in coverage of foreign affairs, with the recent exemption of some coverage of Latin and Central America, has been particularly evident in the media's treatment of political situation in the Third World.

In fact, the case of Uzbekistan seems to provide empirical evidence for the argument made by media critics that while reporters' facility with the subjects they cover has advanced mightily, journalism itself has not.

Most international coverage remains event-oriented, tied to crises, catastrophes, political happenings and matters quite overt. It rarely integrates information from other fields or pays attention to process-oriented topics like international economics, cultural aspects, environmental changes, or world health. All too many foreign correspondents,

steeped in the politics and lore of a given country. still bring an ideological bias to their work. The yield of much foreign reportage appears self-conscious, muddled and distorted. Rarely does a clear picture emerge, one that moves beyond surface events into an understandable process of news.

Why do foreign correspondents often serve as a conduit for policymakers rather than be independent observers? Why is their view of the Third World often diluted by ideological doctrines? One reason lies in a social system that has a direct and indirect influence on journalists jobs. As media critics point out, journalists simply are not exempt from the dominant social forces.

The reality is that journalists, if they are to work and prosper in the mainstream media, often unselfconsciously come to adopt a particular ideological perspective despite the firm commitment of the reporter to fairness, balance, and professionalism. American journalists, whether they realize it or not, tend to look at foreign affairs through the body of rules, practices, and assumptions which exist to insure that the news reporter maintains detachment from his or her subject. In many ways, these rules tend to exaggerate instead of diminish the ideological tendencies of press coverage of events abroad. As Pollock (1981) has argued, "the journalist has usually acquired the dominant world view long before he or she enters journalism." The journalist comes to the subject of U.S. relations with the world from a perspective not remarkably unlike that of the foreign policy elites or of media owners. The canons of journalism do more to keep the perspective intact than to create it.

In the end, many journalists come to see themselves not so much as reporters and observers but as foreign policy experts, writing not for the public at large but for policymakers in Washington and elsewhere.

Thus the main conclusion of this case study is that the press must not act as a judge in coverage of the cultural and political mores of another society; instead, it should concentrate on understanding and interpreting them to the public. Journalists must learn to distinguish between prejudice and knowledge. They must come to recognize historical, cultural, and traditional peculiarities of foreign countries. What is needed is more intellectual leadership from distinguished correspondents abroad. Reporters can do a better job if they have a comprehensive knowledge of a nation's language as well as the mentality of the people they are to tell about in their news stories.

There is hope that as more international journalists acquire experience on the ground in Uzbekistan, they will be less reliant on official U.S. sources. As the economy develops, we should also see more voices enter the marketplace. In addition, as Uzbek officials, media practitioners, and other leaders learn democratic values and gain familiarity with Western news practices and expectations (such as "off the record" and "deep background" interviews), they should better represent the diversity of the country.

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