Chapter 7

INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN: BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY FROM THE OUTSIDE?

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Since the Central Asian republics gained independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, foreign governments and Western NGOs have spent tens of millions of dollars to promote democratization in the region. In 1998 alone the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) spent more than $11 million on democratic transition programs in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.[1] In addition, international organizations, Western European governments, and private organizations, such as the Soros foundations, have all been involved in promoting democracy in the region. Much of the money finances strategies and programs that are designed to strengthen civil society, particularly the creation of an independent third sector in the region, composed of local advocacy NGOs such as professional organizations, women's organizations, and environmental groups. The logic behind these assistance efforts is that funding local and independent

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advocacy NGOs helps to build independent interest groups in civil society that in turn can provide the impetus for democratic reforms or transition.

In Central Asia these democracy assistance programs have produced a number of notable achievements. Both the government and the population now increasingly recognize a burgeoning third sector in the region as a legitimate political player, and many NGOs supported by democracy assistance programs have attained a high degree of success. Democracy assistance programs have empowered local women's groups, such as the Women's Resource Center in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, to engage in community organizing and to publish original research.[2] Democracy assistance programs also provide computers, Internet access, and other infrastructural improvements in the region and sponsor education, training, and exchange programs that are producing a new Westernized elite. Independent local NGOs, such as the International Center Interbilim clearinghouse in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, act as hubs for grassroots organizing on a variety of issues, such as legal reform. And a number of independent international NGOs such as the Soros Foundation and the Christian organization Central Asia Free Exchange (CAFE) provide education, training, and skill development to sectors of the youth population.

Democracy assistance programs, however, have not been as successful in effecting large-scale structural changes in the region or strengthening grassroots democracy beyond individual local successes. It is increasingly clear that Central Asian states are not on a track toward anything resembling liberal democracy. Instead, the trend is toward consolidation of authoritarian or semiauthoritarian rule in the region, coupled with the strategic incorporation of some institutional features and discursive trappings of democracy, resulting in little change in the overall structure of power relations within society and continued economic stagnation and underdevelopment.[3] Despite attempts by international actors to strengthen civil society in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan by supporting the development of a third sector and independent civic advocacy groups, popular opposition to authoritarian regimes in the region comes not from a vibrant Western-style NGO sector but from religious movements or ethnic mobilization. Islamist movements in particular have gained strength as expressions of popular opposition to existing regimes, and Central Asian state elites view these movements as posing a threat to existing power configurations in the region.[4]

Why have international democracy assistance strategies generally been so ineffective in building a working and politically engaged civil society in Central Asia? One reason is certainly the challenging economic and political conditions under which international actors operate in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Given the concrete challenges that local field offices face in implementing programs there, the success rate of the individual programs supported by democracy assistance efforts in the region is surprisingly high. This attests to the dedication and

persistence of many international actors. At the same time, however, the ideal end points that many of these programs and strategies are designed to achieve stand in severe contrast to the reality in which international actors carry out their programs. In part, this may indeed be due to a failure by some international assistance organizations to incorporate an understanding of variations in regional conditions into the design of their strategies. As Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn point out in the first chapter of this book, democratization strategies designed to be applied to "thickly integrating" states are unlikely to have the same effect in "unintegrated states."

At the same time, however, Mendelson and Glenn's discussion of levels of integration into the international community implies but does not address a deeper issue that is at stake here. They define integration as embracing "norms, ideas, and practices common to the democratic states of Western Europe and North America."[5] The norms and practices that democracy assistance programs are promoting have developed within specific cultural and institutional contexts. It is therefore necessary to address not only the relationship that exists between strategies and ideal results but also between the ideal results and local conditions. In other words, evaluations of democracy assistance programs must move beyond an approach that adjusts strategies to fit local conditions and instead incorporates a more fundamental and open discussion regarding the preconditions and assumptions inherent in the notion that exporting a stylized version of liberal democracy to diverse local settings is either possible or desirable. Are the seeds of liberal democracy likely to spawn the same offspring under all conditions? This question suggests that more attention needs to be paid to the interaction between institutions and political culture or, more specifically, the relationship between transplanted and indigenous political institutions.[6]

In this chapter I discuss some challenges facing democracy promotion in Central Asia and suggest reasons why such a gap exists between the vision of democracy that international actors are promoting and the actual results that democracy assistance programs in the region produce. To do this I draw attention to microlevel processes and dilemmas that shape interactions between international assistance organizations and local actors, and I juxtapose the macrolevel goals that shape democracy assistance programs with the microlevel political conditions that local field offices of democracy-promoting agencies and international NGOs encounter. International democracy assistance programs, however well intended, have not reached broad segments of society in Central Asia and have not resulted in macrolevel democratic outcomes in Central Asian states. In fact, many programs have interacted with the local environment in ways that unintentionally aggravate a number of conditions, such as corruption, income inequality, and dependence on foreign aid. These results, however, should not be taken merely as a sign that the strategies that actors use to promote democratization in the region have failed—because many individual

success stories indeed exist at the local level. Rather, they should serve as a reminder that democracy promotion activities, despite great imbalances in power between international and local actors, do not occur within an institutional or cultural vacuum at the local level but are characterized by two-way interactions between international and local actors. The outcome is shaped as much by the local environment into which democracy assistance programs are inserted as it is by the strategies that international actors use to promote democratization.

Local actors draw upon international democracy assistance programs to pursue their own interests, just as international actors in the region represent a certain set of interests to which they are implicitly or explicitly bound. When these interests coincide or can be coordinated, individual programs are likely to be successful. The majority of international assistance organizations have their headquarters in advanced industrial democracies; their overall organizational structure, mission, macrolevel strategies, and programs reflect this context.[7] The goals of international assistance organizations operating in Central Asia reflect the larger geopolitical context within which they operate. Democracy promotion is a key component of U.S. foreign policy, and a large number of democracy assistance organizations in the region are funded by USAID or other government agencies and international organizations.[8] A number of independent international NGOs operate in the region and do not receive government funding, yet the majority of democracy promotion activities in the region are ultimately government funded. There are thus clear limits to the extent to which democracy promotion activities by government-funded international NGOs can be directly compared to the activities of transnational advocacy networks and issue networks that originate predominately from nonstate societal interests rather than the policy interests of powerful states.[9]

Much of the ineffectiveness of democracy assistance strategies in post-Soviet Central Asia is attributable to the challenges that international assistance organizations face as they attempt to operate simultaneously in two or more different institutional environments. Many strategies and programs carried out by international NGOs and other assistance organizations are designed at their headquarters and applied to a variety of local settings. Local branches of international assistance organizations must operate under different conditions in Central Asia and must adapt to these conditions in order to survive. This results in internal incoherence and inefficiency in organizations, as international actors cope with and try to reconcile the contradictory demands of the different environments in which they are embedded. Indeed, the most effective international NGOs are those that operate independently, are flexible, and are able to develop reactive strategies based on local needs, as opposed to proactively implementing strategies imported from abroad. In the former case small international NGOs engaged in grassroots work attempt to meet and articulate local interests. In the latter case international actors arrive with their own interests and

goals and attempt to shape local society to fit these end points. In practice, of course, international actors apply a mix of proactive and reactive strategies in their interactions with the local environment. In principle, however, democracy promotion and the building of civil society are to some extent inherently proactive strategies.

The concept of international actors who promote "grassroots" civil society and democratization in Central Asia is therefore filled with practical and, indeed, philosophical contradictions. To what extent can projects that are run, funded, and administered by international actors really bring about local forms of democratic participation? What is the version of democracy that such actors are promoting? Is this vision appropriate to local conditions? What is the relationship between international democracy assistance and the larger international geopolitical context, and how does this play out at the local level? In countries such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, what should be the balance between basic economic development programs and programs that are designed to promote democratization and civil society? In this chapter my purpose is to provide a context for thinking about the larger issues raised by these questions, as they relate to international democracy assistance in the region.

First, I examine the political context of democracy assistance in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Despite their differences, the two countries share a number of characteristics as "unintegrated states" that provide similar challenges to international actors in designing effective democracy assistance strategies. Second, I present an overview of the international actors, strategies, and programs in the sector of civil society development in Central Asia. I focus primarily on the activities of U.S.-based international donor NGOs, many of which are largely government funded, and I pay particular attention to the ways in which the strategies of international actors have adapted to local conditions. The empirical examples in the chapter are designed to give the reader a sense of what democracy assistance activities look like in Central Asia, how they relate to the local environment, and the inherent dilemmas that local field offices face when they are caught between the conflicting interests of democracy promoters in industrialized states and local actors who are pursuing their own interests. In the conclusion I address what the successes and failures of democracy assistance in Central Asia imply for the overall project of democracy promotion in the region and the power and limits of NGOs that are engaged in this project.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE IN UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

The post-Soviet republics of Central Asia can be described as "unintegrated states," given that these states are far from adopting the institutional practices and political cultures that define Western European and transatlantic political

communities. This should not be surprising, given the states' geographical location, historical legacies, cultural orientations, and low levels of economic development. Indeed, state elites in the region look only partially to the West as a model for political development. Turkey, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, and other East Asian states have all shown interest in the region, and various parties in Central Asia have held many of these countries up as appropriate role models for Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.[10]

Within the Central Asian context Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan appear to provide examples of two contrasting types of political environments that have attracted democracy assistance. Uzbekistan has an authoritarian regime, a largely state-controlled economy, and severe restrictions on freedom of expression and association, while Kyrgyzstan has institutionalized many of the formal institutions of democracy, adopted a policy of economic liberalization, tolerated a relatively independent press, and generally places fewer restrictions on freedoms of expression and association. While these differences do matter for understanding the effect of democracy assistance, more significant are the shared characteristics of the two countries. In addition to their common Soviet institutional legacies, the two countries have similarly high levels of corruption; both are marked by a disjunction between formal and informal political and economic institutions; both have low levels of economic development, accompanied by an uneven distribution of wealth; and both are characterized by a weakened public sector infrastructure, especially in realms such as education, health, and social security.

UZBEKISTAN: AUTHORITARIANISM AND STATE-RUN ECONOMY

Uzbekistan is in many respects less democratic today than during the glasnost period of the late 1980s. During the 1988–1989 period of liberalization in Moscow, widespread political opposition movements such as Birlik (Unity) and Erk (Will, or Freedom) were allowed to operate and hold mass demonstrations. Following Uzbekistan's independence in August 1991, however, President Islam Karimov increasingly strengthened his grip on power and ensured state penetration into almost all areas of social, political, and economic life. The political context of democracy assistance in Uzbekistan cannot be understood without taking into account the sweeping powers of Karimov and the cult of personality that surrounds him and his office.

Karimov has advocated a gradual, rather than rapid, transition to a market economy, arguing that rapid economic transition would be too disruptive. He makes a similar argument with respect to transformation in the political realm. As justification for his political and economic policies, Karimov has in the past

pointed to the relative stability in contemporary Uzbek society, especially when compared to the economic collapse in Russia and the civil wars in the bordering countries of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Indeed, despite the February 1999 bombings in Tashkent, Uzbek society still has a level of stability that gives Karimov's policies a strong measure of legitimacy with the population, which appears to place greater value on economic and political stability than on increased democratization.[11] At the same time, however, evidence exists that the increasingly repressive policies that Karimov's regime has been using to deter the rise of political Islam in the region may be creating conditions that breed the very instability that they are supposedly designed to curtail.[12]

While the pace of political and economic reform has been slow, the implementation of nationalizing policies such as language reform have been fast. Uzbekistan quickly made Uzbek its single official language and is well on its way to the adoption of a Latin alphabet. The country eliminated Soviet symbols in the space of a few months, when in 1996 Karimov ordered the renaming of "administrative-territorial and other objects," arguing that "the names of objects that serve the old order and communist ideology deflect the people from the concept of independence."[13] Uzbekistan has consistently been the most anti-Russian of the Central Asian republics, and it has almost eliminated the Russian language from public view. The state has shut down most Russian cultural groups, with the result that there is little overt opposition to Uzbekification policies. Despite this process, however, Russian still remains the lingua franca among elites.

On paper Uzbekistan has some formal institutions of democracy. Indeed, the constitution, official government documents, and speeches by Karimov are often full of the terminology of liberal democracy. The constitution, for example, guarantees a number of civil and political rights, including freedom of the press and freedom of association. These rights are not, however, recognized in practice. The government owns most printing presses and can easily withhold printing supplies and time slots. Bureaucratic red tape and loopholes can impede registration of nongovernmental organizations within the state. Nominally, Uzbekistan has held parliamentary and presidential elections, but restrictions on political party formation and bureaucratic impediments have prevented open and democratic multiparty elections.[14]

KYRGYZSTAN: ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

In contrast to Karimov in Uzbekistan, President Askar Akaev of Kyrgyzstan embraced policies of economic and political liberalization immediately after independence. Determined to win favor with the international community, he

began to promote a nominally free press, private political associations, and a market economy. Kyrgyzstan quickly gained recognition in the West as an "oasis of democracy" in Central Asia, and by the end of 1993 Western donors had pledged almost half a billion dollars in foreign assistance to the tiny republic.[15] Kyrgyzstan's acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1998—the first newly independent state of the former Soviet Union to gain admittance—demonstrates the extent to which Kyrgyzstan has made neoliberal economic reforms.[16]

Kyrgyzstan has been less insistent than Uzbekistan on ridding itself of the symbols of the Soviet past. Kyrgyzstan's laws give Russian the status of language of "inter-ethnic communication" and make it an official language in some areas.[17] Kyrgyzstan still universally uses the Cyrillic alphabet, and no one has torn down or replaced Soviet monuments, as in Uzbekistan. Ethnic minorities have been generally free to organize and form associations, although, as in the rest of Central Asia, repression of Islamist organizations has increased since the late 1990s.

The differences between the official policies of Karimov and Akaev are striking. Yet while economic and political reforms have gone further in Kyrgyzstan than any other Central Asian republic, it was clear by the mid-1990s that any transition to democracy and a market economy was not to be a linear process. Kyrgyzstan was plagued with problems of corruption, an inefficient bureaucracy, economic decline, and increasing social divisions. In the first four years of independence productivity fell by an average of 18.5 percent per year, and unemployment soared. The industrial sector virtually collapsed under the pressure of market reforms, and it is estimated that the country's 1995 national income was only 25.9 percent of what it was in 1990.[18] By 2001 the country was in an economic crisis and straddled with a foreign debt that is one-third higher than the annual gross domestic product and requires monthly service payments of $12 million to $15 million, leaving only $3 million per month for socioeconomic expenditures by the government.[19]

In 1994 Akaev began to take antidemocratic measures such as closing down newspapers and shutting down parliament. In the 1995 parliamentary elections "fraud, corruption, and public anomie reigned."[20] Since 1995 Akaev has taken steps to consolidate power in the executive branch of government. More recently, the upsurge in popular support for the Communist Party, intensified crackdowns on independent media outlets by the state, and the emergence of Islamist insurgency groups in parts of the country have called into question the image of Kyrgyzstan as a bastion of liberalization in Central Asia.[21] Kyrgyzstan faces numerous obstacles to a transition to a Western-style liberal democratic system and indeed *transitional* may be too optimistic a description of the current situation. Alexander Cooley has observed that "what is currently transpiring in . . . Kyrgyzstan is less institutional transformation, and more the creation of dual or

hybrid institutions, where old established practices tend to coincide and fuse with, rather than be replaced by, new institutions based on Western models."[22]

POLITICAL CONTEXT AND DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES: UZBEKISTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN COMPARED

Important differences between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan affect the work of international actors in the region. For example, repressive government policies in Uzbekistan directly influence the decision of international actors to devote less attention to programs that emphasize human rights or freedom of the press and more attention to programs that are less politically threatening. This has not been as much of a problem in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, some international organizations claim that implementing programs in Uzbekistan is often easier than in Kyrgyzstan, because the centralized government functions better. Kyrgyzstan has severe problems of corruption and miscommunication between different levels of government, which may be partially attributed to "democratizing" reforms that have emphasized the devolution of power to local authorities. Apart from these differences, a number of other factors affect international democracy assistance strategies and outcomes in the region. Some factors are specific to one or the other country; many are common to both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. They include levels of economic development, pervasive corruption, a disjunction between formal and informal institutions, levels of press freedom, societal divisions, and political culture.

The economies of Central Asia are facing not simply problems of "economic transition" but also severe challenges of basic economic development.[23] The low levels of economic development found in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan affect democracy assistance strategies in a number of ways. Democracy assistance programs that are appropriate for more economically developed societies, including many countries in Eastern Europe, are simply not appropriate for Central Asia.[24] For example, the development of self-sustaining local NGOs with membership fees is not a realistic goal where the average monthly income is approximately $25 to $35.[25] Similarly, many democracy assistance programs do not resonate with the goals of the government or the needs of local people, who are more concerned with economic survival than following an idealized Western model of how to be a good citizen. A 1995 survey published by the United States Institute of Peace showed that building a democratic society was low on Central Asians' priority list, compared to achieving economic growth and maintaining social and political order in the region.[26]

Another problem is that most people view the newly rich sector of the population in Central Asia as corrupt and, in the case of Kyrgyzstan, see the wealth and the corruption as products of democratic reforms (the label "democrats," as

applied to them, is meant to be disparaging).[27] "Democratization" is associated with structural changes that have simultaneously led to the destruction of Central Asian economies, the loss of social safety nets, and an increase in economic inequality in the region. This creates a problem for international actors that began to work with newly privileged elites and later tried to expand services to reach a wider spectrum of the population.

Corruption is perhaps the biggest obstacle facing international actors in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and it affects democracy assistance strategies in numerous ways. First, international actors must find a way to operate on an everyday, practical basis in a system in which corruption is the norm. International actors may either not have an official policy for this or may have an official policy that is difficult to adhere to. In either case the de facto policy is likely to be in the hands of the local country director. For example, the director may decide that paying a bribe to get phone lines installed is acceptable, but paying a bribe to get a local NGO registered is not acceptable. Or the director may decide that paying a bribe to get an NGO registered is more reasonable and efficient than going through two years of red tape. Corruption is so entrenched in the region that it is difficult, or maybe even impossible, to operate at the local level without making compromises and arriving at a modus vivendi that straddles the abstract political goals of international actors and the pragmatic means used to promote them. This dilemma is one that is rarely acknowledged or addressed openly by those who are engaged in goal setting and planning at the headquarters of an international assistance organization, leaving the local country directors with almost unresolvable dilemmas that lead to internal contradictions in the implementation of local programs.[28]

In Uzbekistan inconvertibility of Uzbek currency compounds such dilemmas, as do black-market foreign exchange rates that are many times higher than official rates. Some international NGOs prefer to bypass official channels in their financial transactions, arguing that the grassroots organizations that they support can put the money to better use than the government can. Organizations that adhere to a policy of using official channels for financial transactions do so at a high price. The director of one major international NGO estimated that it lost more than $45,000 a year in Uzbekistan by using official financial institutions for currency exchange.[29]

Corruption limits the overall effectiveness of international democracy assistance programs. Grant money donated to local groups may be treated as personal funds; donated equipment might be sold on the black market; and local leaders often insist on skimming money off projects. While an element of mutual exploitation is involved in democracy assistance projects in the region, understanding the dynamics behind corruption is impossible without taking into account the important role that social networks play in all aspects of life in the region.[30] International actors may eventually cancel funding programs, but sur-

viving in Central Asian society without membership in strong reciprocal social networks is impossible. It is thus highly rational for local actors to choose to use external resources to strengthen their indigenous support system and survival networks, rather than put themselves at risk by alienating support networks and playing by rules that are not of their making and are relevant to what may only be short-term transactions. Of course, international actors, at the same time, have to ensure that resources are not misappropriated, yet attempts at doing so have other undesirable consequences, such as creating overwhelming levels of paperwork for local NGOs, limiting the autonomy of groups and impinging upon their ability to make independent decisions, or reinforcing the cultural barriers that exist between local and donor organizations.[31]

Finally, corruption undermines the fundamental logic that informs many democracy assistance strategies. For example, giving professional training to defense lawyers is of little use if the usual way to resolve a case is to bribe the prosecutor or judge. Similarly, educational reform programs, such as instituting competency tests for teachers, do not have the desired effect if bribery pervades all aspects of educational institutions, from admissions procedures to grading to the awarding of degrees. Sending officials on trips abroad may not lead to greater respect for the rule of law but to a heightened desire for expensive Western products that can only be filled by demanding bigger bribes. Democracy assistance programs designed to promote reform must take into account the underlying logic of how local institutions function *in practice*, rather than assume that an idealized version of an institutional arrangement can be transplanted into a new environment without being affected by local realities.

Corruption is a symptom of the disjunction that exists between formal and informal institutions, but other examples exist of discrepancies in how things work on paper or in their formal institutional design and how things work in reality.[32] One example is the discrepancy between written legislation and its actual application. International assistance organizations may take a long time to understand the distinctions between the formal institutions of society and where the real power lies, because informal networks of patronage or personal influence are difficult for outsiders to access. The obvious result is that international actors find it difficult to operate in the local society on an everyday basis: to know which channels to go through for permits and permissions, to know with whom they are really working, or to know how to evaluate the genuineness of grant applications.

In both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan independent NGOs are a relatively new phenomenon and have provoked suspicion on the part of both local and national government officials. Many practitioners in the NGO sector say that officials understand the term *nongovernmental organization* to mean *antigovernment organization*.[33] While this problem is common to both countries, it is more marked in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan. In Kyrgyzstan establishing

good relations between local NGOs and the government has been an ongoing challenge for third-sector actors but has achieved mixed degrees of success.[34] In Uzbekistan government suspicion of NGOs is compounded by its repeated attempts to control the NGO sector by a number of means, including establishing "government NGOs"; attempting to install government personnel as leaders of grassroots NGOs; using threats, sanctions, or bureaucratic red tape to prevent the setting up of local NGOs; and monitoring NGO events.

The Western NGO community in Uzbekistan has engaged in considerable debate about how best to interact with the government and government-organized NGOs (known as "GONGOs" or "quasi NGOs"). Some Western donors have a policy of not providing direct financial assistance to government NGOs, whereas others give assistance to a wide variety of both governmental and nongovernmental organizations.[35] In general, the Western donor community agrees that it must do more to address the issue of relations between international or local NGOs and government officials at the local or national level. But whereas some outside observers view improved NGO-government relations as a much needed step, others are suspicious of what they view as "kowtowing" to government officials.

In both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan the regulatory framework for NGOs provides a number of challenges. In Uzbekistan, for example, "public associations" must register with the Ministry of Justice. This process can be extremely bureaucratic and relatively expensive. Registration fees are the equivalent of twenty monthly salaries for national organizations and ten monthly salaries for local and regional organizations. The organization has to submit its by-laws, which are subject to approval by the ministry. Tax laws in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan make it difficult for local NGOs to finance their activities. For example, NGOs are taxed for any income-generating activities in which they engage, even if these are designed to provide money to underwrite NGO programs. Additionally, contributions to NGOs from private business are not tax exempt.[36]

In Kyrgyzstan relations with government officials have generally improved in the past years, with local governments giving some NGOs land or office space or offering NGOs contracts to perform some social services. However, in some cases problems have arisen, and "the distinction between government and NGOs is blurred."[37] Local governments or parliamentarians have been known to establish NGOs in order to get Western money to carry out local government initiatives and to line their own pockets.

The level of press freedom is considerably different in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The press has almost no freedom in Uzbekistan, and finding foreign publications is difficult. Kyrgyzstan has had a fairly high degree of press freedom (with important exceptions), and there are several independent newspapers. In Uzbekistan NGOs have had mixed success in getting into the press, publicizing their events, and publishing their opinions, such as critiques of new legislation.

When they do gain press coverage, it is mostly superficial but not negative. The typical press coverage of international NGOs consists of a story about a ceremony to initiate a new program or a conference that portrays the event as a sign that Uzbekistan is a modern state. Some international NGOs also use the press to promote and announce grant competitions. In Kyrgyzstan both international and local NGOs have less difficulty getting access to the press, but corruption, scandals, and misappropriations of funds have brought them a great deal of negative publicity from both the government and independent press. At times the government press has made a concerted attack on specific NGOs.

In addition to these concerns, numerous societal divisions affect democracy assistance strategies in Central Asia. These include ethnic, linguistic, and clan or tribal divisions, rural versus urban divisions, and intraelite divisions. Distribution of resources such as humanitarian aid, microcredit lending programs, and NGO grants can easily play into ethnic or local divisions. This has occurred repeatedly in southern Kyrgyzstan. In some cases international NGOs have also increased tensions between ethnic groups in the region by hiring staff of only one ethnic group or by working with only one group in the local population. This has usually occurred inadvertently, from a lack of knowledge or sensitivity on the part of external actors regarding salient cleavage lines.

Language divisions also influence the effectiveness of international NGOs. Most local elites in Central Asia are Russified; most foreigners coming to Central Asia are more likely to know Russian than a local Turkic language, and Russian is still the lingua franca in urban areas. This means that much of democracy assistance is conducted in Russian with Russified elites. This is changing, and democracy assistance organizations are making an effort to publish materials in local languages and provide simultaneous translation at conferences, but the gap is still wide: Many programs operate in Russian despite the large percentage of the population that does not know Russian.

The language problem intensifies the effects of rural-urban divisions in the administration of democracy programs. The first wave of democracy assistance in the region was concentrated in the cities of Central Asia; little assistance reached rural areas, where 80 percent of the population live and where it is most needed. This was a result not only of language issues but of other problems in the ability of international actors to distribute information and monitor rural organizations. The situation has improved somewhat since the late 1990s.

A lack of understanding of the local culture or political culture can in many instances undercut the effectiveness of international NGO strategies in Central Asia. One example comes from work with women and women's organizations: Organizing discussion groups will not be an effective strategy in areas where women are unable to leave the home, nor will seminars on birth control options for young women be effective if participants will be ostracized by the community. Home craft production, which might appear to provide an independent

source of income to women, will not have the desired result if women must hand over all their earnings to the men in the family. Promoting Western-style women's rights may create a negative reaction in areas where it looks like a continuation of forced Russification/Sovietization or the suppression of local traditions.[38]

DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING CIVIL SOCIETY IN CENTRAL ASIA

In both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan much of the democracy assistance provided by international actors is designed to strengthen civil society in the region. This has been in response to the limited political openings that exist in the region, as well as a general trend to focus assistance efforts on projects that will promote democracy from the bottom up.[39] A surprisingly wide variety of actors are involved in democracy assistance in Central Asia. In addition to international NGOs, these include international organizations and multilateral assistance efforts such as the United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, and the European Union's Tempus and TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States) programs; government foreign aid programs such as those run by USAID, the U.S. Information Agency/U.S. Information Service, British Know-How Fund, Swiss Aid; and local NGOs such as the Tashkent Center for Public Education, and International Center Interbilim.[40]

The degree of overlap between the various actors and their strategies is high. For example, distinguishing the interests of a local NGO from the interests of a donor organization is often difficult. Some international NGOs act as contracting organizations for government foreign aid programs, and some local NGOs act as contracting organizations for the development programs of international organizations and international NGOs. A number of different types of actors may work together on specific projects. Actors at all levels can simultaneously pursue a variety of strategies that may at times be contradictory. For example, USAID promotes programs that simultaneously support privatization and democratization—although in some instances these two goals are mutually exclusive.

Table 7.1 provides an overview of the strategies that international actors use to strengthen civil society in the region. Supporting local advocacy groups and an independent third sector is key to their overall strategy. Yet it is only one aspect of the multipronged approach that they pursue in the region. The far left column of table 7.1 suggests the variety of strategies that external actors use to strengthen civil society in Central Asia. The middle column, Methods and Programs, provides a survey of the actual programs that are implemented and funded in the region. The far right column, Actors, lists the organizations engaged in each strategy. In parentheses is the affiliation or funding source of each organization.

TABLE 7.1 Building Civil Society in Central Asia: Strategies, Methods and Actors

Strategy	Methods and Programs	Actors
Create and support independent advocacy groups; foster the development of a local NGO sector	• Provide seed money to establish civic-oriented NGOs • Provide training to individual NGO leaders • Provide grants to local NGOs for specific projects • Strengthen independent interest groups • Create and work with local NGO support centers.	• Counterpart International (USAID) • Eurasia Foundation (USAID) • Soros • INTRAC • NOVIB (largely Dutch gov't.) • EU's TACIS Program • American Bar Association (USAID) • Aid to Artisans (USAID) • Citizens Network for Foreign Affairs, Inc. (USAID) • Save the Children • Center Interbilim (Local NGO clearinghouse, Bishkek)
Expose elites to Western ideas; educate elites in the practices of democracy	• Fund and organize long-term and short-term academic exchange programs • Fund and organize trips abroad • Organize partnerships between local and Western organizations • Provide seminars and conferences on democratic principles • Provide technical assistance and consulting.	• IREX (USIA/USIS) • ACCELS (USIA/USIS + Central Asian governments) • EU's TACIS and Tempus programs • Soros • Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (German gov't.) • Goethe Institute (German gov't.) • British Council (British gov't.) Civic Education Program (largely Soros)
Increase public access to information and ideas	• Provide computers and internet access • Provide internet training • Provide language training • Sponsor and organize conferences for exchange of information between various sectors • Sponsor regional conferences • Provide journal subscriptions • Establish information centers and libraries.	• IREX (USIA/USIS) • Soros • ACCELS (USIA/USIS) • CAFE • American Bar Association (USAID) • INTRAC

(*table continues*)

TABLE 7.1 (*continued*)

Strategy	Methods and Programs	Actors
Change the institutional structure within which civil society operates	• Advise government and draft laws in the areas of NGO development, human rights, and other reforms.	• American Bar Association (USAID) • International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (USAID) • NDI (USAID) • UNDP • CAFE
Transform political culture in society	• Provide textbooks and civic education training materials • Provide pedagogical training to teachers • Provide foreign instructors • Fund and organize youth events (e.g., debate camps and mock parliaments) • Support cultural events.	• Soros • NED (U.S. Congress) • CAFE • Peace Corps • Junior Achievement • Tashkent Center for Public Education (local NGO) • Kyrgyzstan Peace Research Center (local NGO)
Promote community development at the grassroots level	• Conduct community needs assessment • Community empowerment projects • Support and organize local development projects.	• Crosslink International • NOVIB • Mercy Corps International • (USAID) • UNDP • Peace Corps • Aid to Artisans (USAID) • Farmer to Farmer (USAID) • CAFE

CREATING INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY GROUPS

The independent NGO sector in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is an interesting example of both the successes and failures of democracy assistance in Central Asia. The millions of dollars that USAID- sponsored donor organizations, such as Counterpart International and the Eurasia Foundation, have spent on seed money, grants, and training have made a significant difference. Whereas Central Asia had few, if any, independent civic-oriented NGOs when Counterpart began its work, many people in the region now know what an NGO is, and there are hundreds of NGOs, both registered and unregistered. Of these new NGOs, however, only a small percentage are active organizations. The majority are inactive or were set up simply to acquire Western grant money (the so-called BONGOs, or business-oriented NGOs). This means the discrepancy between the "on paper" success story of NGO development in Central Asia and the actual state of

the sector is quite big, as I explain later. Two other problems are the donor-driven nature of the sector and a "brain drain" from the public sector to NGOs.

As a measure of its success, USAID counts the number of NGOs created in a year. For example, in 1998 it listed 157 new NGOs created in Kyrgyzstan.[41] What USAID counts as a success, however, others view as problematic: The British International NGO Training and Research Centre asserts that "new NGOs continue to be established at a sometimes alarming rate."[42] Many, or even most, of the new organizations are likely to be BONGOs, which makes the USAID claim to success rather suspect. Quantitative criteria are not the only evaluative criteria that USAID and its NGOs use, but institutional pressure to measure successes largely in quantitative terms—number of NGOs founded, number of grants distributed, number of people trained—is strong.[43] In order to have their USAID funding renewed, international NGOs have an incentive to distribute as much grant money to as many organizations as quickly as possible.

This quantitative approach to NGO development is slowly changing, but its effects on the sector appear to have been lasting. Seed grants for NGOs of $15,000 or more—a considerable sum in the local economy—constitute a large incentive for the misappropriation of funds.[44] Examples abound of what reappears on the black market—everything from computer equipment to school textbooks and donated heating oil. Commented one observer, "Most of the funds from humanitarian organizations that finds its way there [to Kazakhstan] turns into Mercedes, Ford Explorers, and new houses for the rich and politically connected."[45] Stories of NGO leaders who suddenly buy houses after receiving a grant or are spotted flying first class are equally common in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The problem of misappropriation of funds undermines the effectiveness of the whole NGO sector. When individuals first learned that they could obtain seed money and computer equipment after attending an NGO training session, both countries saw a rush to continually establish new NGOs at the expense of undertaking long-term programming work. Many were resentful when the rules of the funding game began to change. Even when donors are aware of problems of misappropriation, they face an organizational imperative to distribute grant money but lack the organizational resources to work closely with every grantee.

Misappropriation of funds also undermines the credibility of the NGO sector as a whole and is an issue that legitimate local NGOs have repeatedly complained about.[46] The local NGO sector, in the words of one observer, is composed of "both efficient energetic activists and lazy, greedy frauds."[47] Not only do legitimate organizations have a more difficult time being taken seriously in society but they may also be forced to pay for the sins of others. They find themselves overwhelmed with paperwork when donors, attempting to prevent misappropriation, increasingly require them to keep close track of finances, go through official banking channels, obtain receipts for all purchases, submit

quarterly reports, and the like.[48] On the surface this is a reasonable way of trying to get the misappropriation problem under control. However, what are standard procedures in the West can easily take on burdensome dimensions for small organizations where bureaucracy is relentless and receipts are the exception. Furthermore, paperwork can easily be falsified and does not, in and of itself, prevent misappropriation.

One side-effect of misappropriation is that well-known legitimate local NGOs quickly become overextended. They are overburdened with paperwork and find that every international donor organization wishes to work through them. This is a danger for the best local organizations in both countries. Some successful organizations are able to manage this challenge and either expand slowly or turn down project and grant offers. Others may find that their effectiveness decreases as they become answerable to more and more different international donors.

A further problem with the NGO sector in Central Asia is its donor-driven nature. Local NGOs receive almost 100 percent of their funds from international actors and can easily become almost 100 percent donor driven. A 1997 survey of the third sector in the region acknowledges that "many of the lessons learned in other countries about creating NGO dependency on donor strategies appear not to have been taken account of here in Central Asia."[49] In some cases international donors implicitly or explicitly expect local NGOs to administer programs that do not necessarily match local needs. A common complaint by local NGOs is that donors are more interested in their own agendas than those of the region and that they take an approach of handing out money and then asking for reports from local NGOs, rather than providing core management or organizational support relevant to the local context.[50]

Local NGOs also point to problems with funding cycles. Many local NGOs find it difficult to cover their operating costs, since most grant money available is to support start-up costs or specific projects. Grants rarely cover salaries and overhead. Expenses such as international phone and fax bills can quickly mount as local NGOs become more successful and make contact with overseas organizations. Local NGOs also have a sense of uncertainty because they are aware that they are financially dependent on donors and can never be sure that international NGOs will not pull out of Central Asia and stop funding their projects. This is not a feature unique to Central Asia, but the uncertainty regarding long-term commitments in the region, combined with the larger sense of economic uncertainty produced by rapid transition and economic decline, further contributes to the problem of misappropriation of funds.

One unintended consequence of the emphasis on developing a local NGO sector is the continued brain drain from the public sector to the NGO sector. This is good news in some respects for the NGO sector and bad news for the public sector. Ula Ikramova and Kathryn McConnell write that many women

who have started and led Central Asia's NGOs are professionals with experience in problem solving—scientists, physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, administrators, artists, museum workers, architects, and advocates.[51] This is a positive aspect of NGO development, as highly qualified people often head the burgeoning sector. The problem is that many of these people may turn to the NGO sector as a means to earn an income that is simply not attainable as, for example, a university professor or high school English teacher. This creates, for the public sector, a serious deficit of qualified professionals. It may also create a problem for the NGO sector, because many may be doing jobs for which they are not ideally suited (e.g., they are academics who would prefer to be doing research but are obligated instead to produce newsletters). Some view NGOs simply as a means to support their own research or their main line of work and may thereby lack a deep commitment to the sector.

EXPOSING ELITES TO WESTERN IDEAS AND MODELS

A second strategy used by international NGOs in Central Asia has been to expose local elites to Western ideas and institutions by bringing Central Asian elites to Western countries on short trips or for academic exchanges and by bringing Western ideas to Central Asian elites via conferences, seminars, technical assistance, and partnership programs.

Academic exchanges were institutionalized in Central Asia before the breakup of the Soviet Union, but since that time they have expanded and attracted more participants. The major challenge for the biggest academic exchange organizations, IREX (International Research and Exchanges Board) and ACCELS (American Council for Collaboration in Education and Language Study), has been to disburse information about exchange programs, attract qualified applicants, and ensure that the selection process is fair and transparent. One notorious problem has been that academic exchanges and trips are viewed as a form of patronage. The long-term effects of academic and professional exchanges are difficult to measure. Most returnees have good English skills and are therefore in high demand in Western firms or international organizations. In theory academic and professional exchanges provide training and open up new possibilities for work or research. However, many participants have a difficult time making use of their training when they return to their home countries and may face challenges in reintegrating into their old work environment, often leaving it soon after to work for a Western organization. Nevertheless, many have gone on to make significant contributions in their fields and are able to act as a bridge between local and Western organizations.

The regime in Uzbekistan routinely uses access to externally funded seminars, conferences, and trips as a form of patronage. A certain number of slots are

allotted to government-chosen participants in USAID-funded trips and conferences. Similarly, the attendees of seminars on democracy sponsored by groups such as the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung are almost wholly apparatchiks. A similar problem exists with the European Union's Tempus programs, which pair local and Western educational institutions. Trips abroad may increase not only professional aspirations but also consumer appetites. One critic argues that trips abroad for government officials lead to greater corruption, because they develop new consumer tastes that their civil servant salaries cannot support, and this increases the incentives for corruption.[52]

Exchange programs and travel are a crucial aspect of democracy assistance in the region. If political change in the direction of democratization, liberalization, and increased openness is to occur in the region as a whole, it will likely come from a Westernized elite that has participated in exchange programs and established ties with foreign institutions. At the same time, because of the language and other skills required for participation, these are programs geared toward a small percentage of the country's elite, not the general public. Given the severe inequalities that have arisen in the region since independence from the Soviet Union, it is important that programs such as exchanges and trips abroad be balanced with assistance that can strengthen the basic educational infrastructure in the region.[53]

INCREASING PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

A third strategy of international actors has been to provide increased access to information and ideas in Central Asia. One popular method for facilitating access to information has been to provide computers, Internet hookups and access, and training. Primarily because of the work of international NGOs and substantial financial support from the U.S. government, Internet access in Central Asia has increased from virtually none in the early 1990s to the current level with several national and local providers; most educational institutes and local NGOs are on line. In addition, public access sites are numerous, although most of the local population does not use them. As of 2001 only a very small portion of the total population (approximately 0.2 percent) used computers and had access to the Internet.[54]

Despite efforts by international actors to promote Internet usage in the region, the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics have earned a reputation for having some of the least connected and tightly controlled areas of Internet access in the world. Together they comprise one-quarter of the world's "enemies of the Internet," according to the 2000 *Annual Report* of Reporters Sans Frontières; three out of five republics require Internet connections to be run through the government.[55] In Uzbekistan the government is attempting to catch up with the implications of Internet access and is now requiring Internet providers to regis-

ter and sign agreements pertaining to the content of information to be distributed. Government concerns about Internet access in Uzbekistan focus on both political and moral issues. A particular government concern is that the Internet will become an organizing tool for Islamic fundamentalists and other opposition groups. While international actors were the first to promote Internet access in the region, and access has certainly grown since the early 1990s, early predictions that Internet access would lead to greater democratization in Central Asia have proved to be overly optimistic. Instead, governments in the region are adapting to the Internet and at times using it to their advantage to monopolize political control and raise revenue by instituting access fees.[56]

CHANGING THE DOMESTIC INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Several international organizations are working for legal reform in areas such as NGO laws, human rights, and women's issues. NGOs have had some success with legal reform in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Foundation for International Legal Cooperation, International Center Interbilim, and the Krygyz Bar Association were all part of an NGO coalition that was influential in developing a new regulatory framework for NGOs in Kyrgyzstan. Some claim that this "may be the only genuinely successful case of effective legislative lobbying by domestic NGOs in the region."[57] A consortium of international assistance organizations in Uzbekistan also drafted new NGO laws in 1998. The government initially rejected them, but several months later President Karimov announced that Uzbekistan, as a "modern country," needed to revise its laws on associations to allow for more freedoms for NGOs. He established a working group to draft a new NGO law, and in late December 1998 the Uzbek parliament unanimously approved a new NGO law with Karimov's support. In April 1999 Uzbekistan became the first country in the region to adopt a completely new law aimed only at NGOs; the new law allows for the establishment of philanthropic foundations and simplifies registration procedures.[58]

These examples point to the influence that international and local NGOs have had in achieving both legal reform and symbolic changes in governments' attitudes toward NGOs. The extent to which the new law will substantively affect the NGO sector in Uzbekistan remains to be seen. Richard Remias writes, "Most commentators on the new legislation agree that ultimately the law will prove itself in the way it's implemented and enforced by the authorities."[59] If past instances of legal reform provide any indication, only a minimal de facto change is likely to occur. Legislation that was adopted in the area of women's rights, for example, was not implemented. This is a problem that affects legal reform in all areas: The process of reform is slow and time consuming, and any written changes are likely to be open to a broad range of interpretation or even

ignored in practice. Still, legal changes provide symbolic openings that both local and international actors can draw upon to expand the role of nonstate actors in the region.

TRANSFORMING POLITICAL CULTURE

Another broad strategy for building civil society is to promote civic education, educational reforms, and cultural events. Kyrgyzstan has seen much more activity in this area than Uzbekistan has because of the continued government restrictions there. Promoting civic education includes teacher training and providing civics and history textbooks and training materials. In Kyrgyzstan civic education programs have been widespread and successful, but they appear to have been quite divisive because they have been done without the participation of the Ministry of Education. A number of local groups in Kyrgyzstan compete to provide civic education textbooks (and receive grants for the provision of textbooks), leading to confusion about the motives of the different organizations, the content of the different textbooks, and a hostile and less than civil atmosphere surrounding the whole enterprise.

In Uzbekistan civic education programs are at a very early stage of development. The government has tighter control of education and the content of textbooks. The sector is small, with groups working together rather than competing. Providing civics textbooks and training has a limited effect because teachers, especially in rural areas, are surviving on low salaries and therefore have little incentive or motivation to devote time and resources to adding a new field of study to their curricula.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL

A number of international actors are engaged in what could be termed "grassroots community development work." Small community development projects appear to be among the most successful forms of democracy assistance in the region. However, few organizations are flexible enough to work at the local level and respond to local needs. Such community development work is labor intensive and will affect only a small number of people initially but may have a more enduring and greater influence than larger projects. Such small-scale projects reach sectors of the population that are difficult to reach in other ways. The most successful projects are run by dedicated volunteers with a strong personal interest in the region and are cemented by personal relationships with members of the community. They do not necessarily include the direct transfer of financial resources or equipment. That personal relationships form the basis of these

projects is more in tune with local norms and appears to lead to better results than projects that are run in a more "rational-bureaucratic" style.[60]

The grassroots approach has had mixed results when administered by larger organizations. Observers count the USAID-sponsored Aid to Artisans program as one of the most successful democracy assistance programs in the region and has resulted in the development of strong, independent, and financially self-sustaining regional artisan organizations engaged in making traditional handicrafts. Several artisan organizations have independently contested local government policies by organizing petition campaigns. Artisan organizations have also been successful both at getting grants from outside donors and at collecting membership fees from their constituencies. The reason for this success is that the programs' design gave participants a strong personal financial stake in the success of the organization, and they received tangible economic benefits; for example, association members could participate in local crafts fairs that were targeted at the Western expatriate community in Central Asia. In contrast, another USAID program, which was designed to foster the development of independent farmers' associations, had to shut down after a massive misappropriation of microcredit funds that further entrenched local divisions, inequalities, and corruption. Part of the explanation is that the farmers' associations were not bringing their members direct financial benefits, and the programs were in rural areas, which are more difficult for the central administration to monitor.

My purpose here has been to provide examples of how democracy promotion activities function in "unintegrated states" that are characterized by semiauthoritarian or authoritarian regimes. I discussed features of the Central Asian setting that influence the effectiveness of international democracy assistance programs, and I described and evaluated various strategies that international actors use to build civil society within such an environment. By highlighting both the successes and failures of democracy assistance in the region, I have highlighted the power and limits of international NGOs as actors that can effect significant political changes in the region. Despite many individual success stories, and some promising trends, the overall effect of democracy assistance in the region has been largely limited to the development of an externally funded third sector and has not brought about large-scale political changes leading to greater democratization.

One point that I want to emphasize is the disjunction between visions of democracy as promoted by many international actors in the region and the actual social, political, and economic conditions in Central Asia. This means that local branch offices of international NGOs are involved in a continual struggle to reconcile competing demands from their head office and local constituencies. In the case of democracy assistance to Central Asia, international actors

often rely on fixed meanings of democracy, civil society, and NGOs that bear little relation to the realities of the local environment. In addition, local structures constrain international actors in their work—the means of promoting democracy are at times less than democratic—often because of the structural contradictions between the two environments (headquarters and local office).

International actors need to explicitly take into account the effect of informal processes and institutions on their strategies and programs and pay as much attention to these factors as to the formal institutional environment. These include patronage networks, ethnic cleavages, the local political culture, and informal networks. Legal and other reforms will be unsuccessful, and will lead only to the creation of hybrid organizations, such as patronage-based NGOs, if such processes and institutions are not taken fully into account. The best democracy assistance programs can be quickly undermined if they are not designed with an eye for how they will interact with informal processes and local power configurations.[61]

The model of promoting democracy by creating parallel Western-style institutions and organizations, rather than by strengthening and working with existing structures and institutions, has its limits. An internationally funded "democracy sector" that has no deep roots in local society, and interacts little with indigenous institutions and structures, is in danger of exacerbating tensions between the small elite that is able to benefit from international assistance and the majority of the population, which is struggling for economic survival and, increasingly, the right to religious expression. The hostility of the region's governments to most forms of political Islam has contributed to the increased politicization of religion as a form of opposition to authoritarian regimes. At a minimum international actors must be willing to work with a variety of local groups in the region, including religious organizations and institutions, but also extending to government-organized NGOs as well as to traditional local community structures, such as the neighborhoods associations (*mahallas*) in Uzbekistan. The latter have been co-opted by the state but nonetheless still provide the basis for communal life in many areas. If international actors work exclusively with the so-called independent NGO sector—which is largely an artificial creation of foreign assistance organizations—they will continue to reach only a small sector of society, which may be more attuned to international funding trends than local political needs.

Following an early period of enthusiasm and optimism about the prospects for democratic transition in the region, the growing consensus is that the language of transition is increasingly counterproductive for addressing the core problems facing Central Asian states.[62] Moving beyond the language of transition and reevaluating the goals of assistance programs in this light may provide a means for international assistance organizations to reconcile the discrepancies between their mission statements in the region and the political context faced

by local field offices. If democracy assistance is to be context specific in Central Asia, this may mean less democracy assistance and a greater emphasis on grassroots economic and local community development projects. Democracy assistance efforts that are appropriate for the level of economic and political development in Eastern Europe and Russia are not necessarily appropriate for Central Asia. While democracy assistance programs geared to NGO development and civic education have had notable successes in the region, they cannot be expected to expand in areas where basic economic and educational opportunities are limited. Any effective strategy of democracy assistance in Central Asia must focus first and foremost on programs that promote human development and redress social and economic inequalities in the region.

NOTES

1. U.S. Agency for International Development, FY1998 presentation to Congress for Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, available at the USAID Web site http://www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp98www.usaid.gov/pubs/cp98 (November 5, 2001).

2. The results of this research appear in Marfua Tokhtakhodjaeva and Elmira Turgumbekova, *The Daughters of Amazons: Voices from Central Asia* (Lahore, Pakistan: Shirkat Gah, 1994) and *Assertions of Self: The Nascent Women's Movement in Central Asia* (Lahore, Pakistan: Shirkat Gah/Women Living Under Muslim Law, 1995).

3. For more about this pattern and the challenges that it poses to the promotion of democracy, see Martha Brill Olcott and Marina Ottaway, *The Challenge of Semiauthoritarianism* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999). See also Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (November–December 1997): 22–43.

4. The extent to which Islamist movements have a role to play in the region as indigenous social movements and political opposition parties is subject to debate. States in the region severely repress Islamist activity by groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and the U.S. State Department has placed the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan on its list of terrorist organizations. Yet many observers have argued that moderate Islam can play a more prominent role in the development of an independent civil society in the region. Promoting institutional channels that can be used by moderate Islamist movements to participate as legitimate political actors in civil society should be one of the goals of democracy assistance in the region. See, for example, Abumannob Polat, "Can Uzbekistan Build Democracy and Civil Society?" in M. Holt Ruffin and Daniel C. Waugh, eds., *Civil Society in Central Asia*, pp. 135–57 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Reuel Hanks, "Civil Society and Identity in Uzbekistan: The Emergent Role of Islam," in Ruffin and Waugh, *Civil Society*, pp. 158–79; and Roger D. Kangas, "The Three Faces of Islam in Uzbekistan," *Transition* 1, no. 24 (December 29, 1995): 17–21. For general discussions of the political dimensions of Islam in the region, see Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower, eds., *Islam and Central Asia: An Enduring Legacy or an Evolving Threat?* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Political and

Strategic Studies, 2000), and Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism?* (London: Zed, 1994).

5. Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn, "Introduction: Transnational Networks and NGOs in Postcommunist Societies," p. 10.

6. For an excellent discussion of problems of commensurability between Western notions of democracy and local practices, see Frederic C. Schaffer, *Democracy in Translation: Understanding Politics in an Unfamiliar Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For a discussion of the relationship between international norms and local institutions in democracy promotion activities in Central Asia, see Fiona B. Adamson, "International Norms Meet Local Structures: The Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Post-Soviet Central Asia" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 30–September 3, 2000).

7. See Thomas Carothers, "Democracy Assistance: The Question of Strategy," *Democratization* 4, no. 3, (Autumn 1997): 109–32.

8. On the geopolitics of democracy promotion, see William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: U.S. Intervention, Globalization, and Hegemony* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The most comprehensive survey and evaluation of U.S. democracy assistance programs is Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).

9. See Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), for a discussion of transnational advocacy networks.

10. See Ali Banuaziz and Myron Weiner, eds., *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Alvin Z. Rubinstein and Oles M. Smolansky, eds., *Regional Power Rivalries in the New Eurasia: Russia, Turkey, and Iran* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1995); Michael Mandelbaum, ed., *Central Asia and the World* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994). For an argument that Uzbekistan is "transitioning" from a Soviet-style to East Asian–style autocracy, see William Donald Shingleton, "Uzbek Autocracy in the Central Asian Context" (master's thesis, Harvard University, 2000).

11. In surveys conducted in 1994–1995, less than one-eighth of the respondents said that a "Western-style democracy" was the best political system for Uzbekistan. Within that small group, less than 1 in 4 said that a politician should be "democratic" in order to win votes. Similarly, only 16 percent of respondents felt strongly that a political opposition is a necessary element of a democracy. More than half of respondents felt that limiting political rights and freedoms in order to solve economic problems is appropriate, and half of all respondents were willing to support "any system, as long as there is order." See Nancy Lubin, *Central Asians Take Stock: Reform, Corruption, and Identity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1995); Office of Research and Media Reaction, U.S. Information Agency, "Uzbekistanis Broadly Back Karimov," December 27, 1994, and "In Uzbekistan, Checkered Views of Democracy," June 15, 1995; William Fierman, "Political Development in Uzbekistan: Democratization?" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot, eds., *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 396–98.

12. While Karimov increasingly represses almost all forms of pious religious expression, organized underground Islamist opposition groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (which has expanded from a national to a pan–Central Asian movement, with ties to the al Queda network) have grown in strength, and the region has been characterized by sporadic insurgencies. Even before U.S. military action in Afghanistan, many experts claimed that Central Asia was on the verge of becoming a region of permanent low-intensity warfare, should political and economic conditions not improve. See, for example, Ahmed Rashid, "Confrontation Brews Among Islamic Militants in Central Asia," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, November 22, 2000, http://www.cacianalyst.org/Nov_22_2000/Islamic_Militants_in_Central_Asia.htm (November 5, 2001); Stephen Blank, "Rumors of War in Central Asia," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, May 9, 2001, http://www.cacianalyst.org/May_9_2001/May_9_2001_RUMORS_OF_WAR.htm (November 5, 2001); Alima Bissenova, "The Latest Hizb-ut-Tahrir Trial Defendants Say They Confessed Under Torture," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, June 6, 2001, published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, http://www.cacianalyst.org/June_6_2001/June_6_2001_Uzbekistan_Trial.htm (November 5, 2001).

13. Graham Smith et al., *Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 140 and 147.

14. For example, in the 1991 elections the government gave groups one day to collect the sixty thousand signatures required to get on the ballot. In 2000 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe refused to send a delegation of observers to the presidential elections, claiming that it would be pointless because voters had no real choice, thanks to media restrictions in Uzbekistan, the deregistration of candidates and parties, and the politicization of the Central Election Commission. See Fierman, "Political Development," pp. 378–79; Shingleton, "Uzbek Autocracy," pp. 16–17.

15. Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: The Fate of Political Liberalization," in Dawisha and Parrot, *Conflict, Cleavage and Change*, p. 242.

16. Kyrgyzstan was also the first of the Central Asian republics to break the ruble zone and win International Monetary Fund approval of its reforms in May 1993. See Richard Pomfret, *The Economies of Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), chaps. 8 and 11.

17. Smith et al., *Nation Building*, p. 201.

18. Turar Koichuev, "Kyrgyzstan: Economic Crisis and Transition Strategy," in Boris Rumer, ed., *Central Asia in Transition: Dilemmas of Political and Economic Development* (Armonk, N.Y.: Sharpe, 1996), p. 170.

19. "Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Debt Hits $2 Billion," *RFE/RL Newsline*, July 2, 2001.

20. Smith et al., *Nation Building*, p. 201.

21. See Gulsara Osorova, "Communists Win Election in Kyrgyzstan's 'Island of Democracy,'" *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, March 15, 2000, http://www.cacianalyst.org/Mar15/COMMUNISTS_WIN_ELECTION.htm (November 5, 2001); Maria Utyganova, "Crackdown on Independent Media in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, April 25, 2001, http://www.cacianalyst.org/April_25_2001/April_25_2001_Media_Crackdown_Kyrgyzstan.htm (November 5, 2001); "Media Is (Again) 'Under

Press' in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, July 18, 2001, http://www.cacianalyst.org/July_18_2001/July_18_2001_Media_Kyrgyzstan.htm (November 5, 2001); Gulzina Karym Kyzy, "Kyrgyzstan Under the Specter of Islamic Militants," *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, May 23, 2001, http://www.cacianalyst.org/May_23_2001/May_23_2001_Kyrgyzstan_Islamic_Specter.htm (November 5, 2001).

22. Alexander Cooley, "Evaluating NGO Strategies and the Effectiveness of Democracy Promotion in Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan" (unpublished manuscript, Columbia University, May 1998), p. 6.

23. Pomfret, *Economies of Central Asia*, and the review essay by Alexander Cooley, "Transitioning Backward: Concepts and Comparison in the Study of Central Asia's Political Economy," *Harriman Review* 11, nos. 1–2 (1998): 1–11.

24. In this respect the Central Asian cases closely resemble that of Romania, which Thomas Carothers analyzes in detail in *Assessing Democracy Assistance: The Case of Romania* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996), esp. pp. 66–74.

25. Karimov ordered the monthly minimum wage in Uzbekistan to be raised 40 percent to $9 per month beginning August 1, 2001. See "Uzbek President Decrees Increase in Pensions, Minimum Wage," *RFE/RL Newsline*, July 3, 2001, http://www.rferl.org/newsline/2001/07/030701.html (November 5, 2001).

26. Lubin, *Central Asians Take Stock*, p. 4. The survey sample was drawn from populations in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Ninety percent of respondents to the survey viewed the need to "strengthen social order and discipline" as the most pressing problem facing Uzbekistan.

27. Jeremy Bransten, "Kyrgyzstan: A Democracy Only for the Rich," *RFE/RL Reports*, October 14, 1997, http://www.rferl.org/nca/features/1997/10/F.RU.971014134805.html (November 5, 2001).

28. Author's interviews in Tashkent, September 1998. One concrete example of this is budget allocation and the question of how local field offices should record expenditures for bribes in accounting procedures.

29. Author's interview, Tashkent, September 1998.

30. David M. Abramson, "Civil Society and the Politics of Foreign Aid in Uzbekistan," *Central Asia Monitor*, no. 6 (1999): 1–12.

31. Author's interviews with local NGO officials in Tashkent and Bishkek, September–October 1998. Several local NGO officials argued that demanding receipts is unrealistic, because official receipts are not readily available for many goods and services. They claimed that filling out paperwork was taking an inordinate amount of time away from programming activities. Many also were resentful that donors did not trust local NGOs to manage their own finances.

32. For a related discussion see Carothers, "Democracy Assistance," pp. 122–24.

33. Author's interviews in Tashkent and Bishkek, September and October 1998.

34. Erkinbek Kasybekov, "Government and Nonprofit Sector Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic," in Ruffin and Waugh, *Civil Society*, pp. 71–84.

35. As of 1998, for example, the Eurasia Foundation provided grants to both independent and government-organized NGOs, whereas Counterpart International al-

lowed government-organized NGOs to use its resource center but funded only independent NGOs.

36. For overviews of the regulatory environment facing NGOs in Central Asia, see Scott Horton and Alla Kazakina, "The Legal Regulation of NGOs: Central Asia at a Crossroads," in Ruffin and Waugh, *Civil Society*, pp. 34–56; Sarah Prosser, "Reform Within and Without the Law: Further Challenges for Central Asia Nongovernmental Organizations," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 4–16, available at http://www.fas.harvard.edu/asiactr/haq/200003/0003a001.htm (November 5, 2001); Richard Remias, "The Regulation of the NGO in Central Asia: Current Reforms and Ongoing Problems," *Harvard Asia Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 18–26.

37. Anne Garbutt, "NGO Support Organisations in Central Asia," paper prepared for the International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford, October 1997, p. 13.

38. I thank Nailya Ablieva for suggesting these examples.

39. See Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*, pp. 207–51, for a discussion of the "bottom-up" approach to democracy assistance.

40. For an overview of civil society activity in Central Asia, see Ruffin and Waugh, *Civil Society*, which also provides a useful listing of both international and local NGOs in the region. See also Nancy Lubin and Monica Ware, "Aid to the Former Soviet Union: When Less Is More," Project on the Newly Independent States, JNA Associates, New York, March 1996. For a survey of U.S., European Union, and U.N. democracy assistance programs, see, respectively, Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad*; Kepa Sodupe and Eduardo Benito, "The Evolution of the European Union's Tacis Programme, 1991–96," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 14, no. 4 (December 1998): 51–68; Christopher C. Joyner, "The United Nations and Democracy," *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations* 5, no. 3 (July–September 1999): 333–57.

41. USAID, presentation to Congress.

42. Garbutt, "NGO Support Organisations," p. 9.

43. USAID "Results Indicators" for the $5 million to be spent on democratization in Uzbekistan in FY1998 were quantitative: for example, to have two hundred advocacy NGOs in Uzbekistan by 1999 (from a baseline of zero in 1992). For Kyrgyzstan the target was four hundred NGOs in 1999 (from a baseline of zero in 1992). See USAID, presentation to Congress.

44. The dollar figure comes from Lubin and Ware, "When Less Is More," p. 27.

45. The observer was James Brainard, founder of the private humanitarian aid organization Cornerstone, quoted in Sharon Taylor, "Melon Diplomacy," *Amador County (California) Ledger Dispatch*, September 25, 1998, p. A3. See also Matt Bivens, "Aboard the Gravy Train," *Harper's*, August 1997, pp. 69–76.

46. See, for example, Garbutt, "NGO Support Organisations," p. 14.

47. Prosser, "Reform Within and Without," p. 7.

48. Author's interviews with local NGOs in Tashkent and Bishkek, September and October 1998.

49. Garbutt, "NGO Support Organisations," p. 3.

50. Ibid., p. 9.

51. Ula Ikramova and Kathryn McConnell, "Women's NGOs in Central Asia's Evolving Societies," in Holt and Waugh, *Civil Society*, pp. 198–213.

52. See also Cooley, "Evaluating NGO Strategies."

53. With regard to education, one of the most successful initiatives in the region has been undertaken not by Western organizations but by a liberal Turkish Islamist organization headed by Fethullah Gülen. It has set up a network of high schools and educational institutions in Central Asia and other parts of the former Soviet Union. These schools have a moderate Islamic orientation that emphasizes individual spiritual development, and they provide excellent training in foreign languages, computer skills, and economics.

54. Eric Johnson, "Left Behind in the Rush to Go Online," *Open Society News*, Spring 2001, http://www.eurasianet.org/osn/Left_Behind.html (November 5, 2001).

55. Ibid.; Bea Hogan, "Internet Latest Battleground for Central Asian Repression." *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, July 19, 2000, http://www.cacianalyst.org/July_19/INTERNET_LATEST_BATTLEGROUND_TO%20CONTROL_CENTRAL_ASIAN_SOCIETY.htm (November 5, 2001).

56. On the strategies of authoritarian regimes for regulating the Internet, see Shanthi Kalathil and Taylor C. Boas, *The Internet and State Control in Authoritarian Regimes: China, Cuba, and the Counterrevolution* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2001).

57. Horton and Kazakina, "Legal Regulation of NGOs," p. 39.

58. Remias, "Regulation of the NGO," p. 20.

59. Ibid.

60. Some of the most effective community development projects are run by independent evangelical Christian organizations, such as Central Asia Free Exchange and Crosslink International, whose volunteers immerse themselves in the local culture. Like the schools run by Turkish Islamists, these associations efficiently provide needed services, which are dispensed by religiously motivated individuals who are interested in developing personal relationships with their constituencies.

61. Cooley, "International Aid."

62. Anthony Richter, "Looking Beyond Transition in Central Asia," *Open Society News*, Spring 2001, http://www.eura_Hlt521312094s_Hlt521312094ianet.org/osn/Looking_Beyond_Transition.html (November 5, 2001).