

## **Uzbeks Work on Rapprochement with US**

**Author:** IWPR

Uzbekistan's leaders have come up with a plan that reveals their determination to rebuild ties with the United States and restore the relationship to pre-2005 levels.

An action plan approved by President Islam Karimov in late January includes a programme of reciprocal visits with the US, and 50 joint projects concerning political, economic, defence and security matters.

Of central importance is the provision of an Uzbek "corridor" to allow US-led forces to receive supplies from the relatively secure north rather than via Pakistan.

Uzbekistan's military is expected to receive various forms of US assistance. Army officers may be sent on training course in the US, and the State and Defence Departments are discussing assistance that might be given under the Foreign Military Financing and Excess Defence Articles programmes, the latter of which provides for transfers of army surplus equipment.

This burst of activity is being seen as the outcome of consultations launched when Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake visited Uzbekistan last autumn. A second round of talks is scheduled for the first half of 2010.

From 2001 to 2005, the US military used an air base at Karshi in south-eastern Uzbekistan to supply its Afghan operations, but it was forced to leave after relations soured because of Washington's demand for an independent investigation into the shooting of demonstrators in Andijan in May 2005.

The Uzbek authorities began attempts to repair the relationship about a year ago, with an offer in February 2009 to allow "non-lethal" cargo to cross its territory en route to Afghanistan.

NBCentral Asia analysts say the new cooperation plan is founded on a pragmatic view of mutual advantage.

Washington is keen to secure its position in Central Asia, which its rival Moscow regards as its own backyard. For its part, Uzbekistan is seeking ways to maintain a degree of independence from the Kremlin.

Both countries have an interest in securing stability on Afghanistan. Tashkent has been pushing for a United Nations-led group of neighbours and great powers.

"The interests of Tashkent and the Obama administration currently overlap, and the Uzbek president wants to take advantage of this," said a member of Uzbekistan's parliament. "Although Uzbekistan has been criticised for problems with civil and political rights, the [cooperation] plan is somewhat more optimistic than might have been expected".

Farhod Tolipov, a political scientist in Tashkent, said the rapprochement was “obvious” since in his view, Uzbekistan had tended towards pro-western policies since it gained independence in 1991.

“The Strategic Partnership Declaration which the two countries signed in 2002 was not denounced even at the most difficult period of the relationship,” he said. “The direction we have chosen has won out.”

“For the US, Uzbekistan is a key state,” said Tolipov, adding that Washington never stopped sending positive signals out to Tashkent at various levels.

(NBCA is an IWPR-funded project to create a multilingual news analysis and comment service for Central Asia, drawing on the expertise of a broad range of political observers across the region. The project ran from August 2006 to September 2007, covering all five regional states. With new funding, the service has resumed, covering Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.)

**Location:** [Uzbekistan](#)

**Focus:** [News Briefing Central Asia](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/uzbeks-work-rapprochement-us>