More than 500 killed, thousands wounded

Uzbekistan: US “war on terror” yields a bloodbath

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The Bush administration’s “global war on terrorism” has recorded one of its bloodiest victories yet with the slaughter of several hundred men, women and children in the Uzbekistan city of Andijan.

This brutal massacre was carried out by the regime of President Islam Karimov, one of the Bush administration’s closest allies in Central Asia. His military forces that executed the mass killings have been trained, supplied and aided by the Pentagon.

Citing the testimony of a doctor in the city, the Associated Press reported that 500 bodies have been laid out in front of a local school waiting to be identified by relatives. Another 2,000 people were wounded when the troops opened fire on a mass demonstration in the city’s central square Friday, the doctor reported.

“They shot at us like rabbits,” a teenage boy told the Reuters news agency, recounting the carnage that took place when heavily armed troops and armored cars turned their guns on the demonstration of over 3,000.

Reports from the city told of streets still soaked with blood and pavement littered with corpses, body parts and blood-soaked clothing.

According to one witness quoted by Reuters, soldiers were ordered to execute the wounded.

“Those wounded who tried to get away were finished with single shots from a Kalashnikov rifle,” said a businessman. “Three or four soldiers were assigned to killing the wounded.”

Others told of trucks being driven into the square and loaded full of bodies to be carted off. Literally tons of corpses were removed from the city center in this fashion.

In the wake of the massacre, thousands of Uzbeks have fled across the border into neighboring Kyrgyzstan in an attempt to escape the repression.

While the Bush administration has over the past year fulminated against established regimes in Georgia and Ukraine—promoting the “Rose Revolution” in the first country and the “Orange Revolution” in the second—Washington has remained remarkably circumspect as the streets of Andijan turned red with blood.

Neither the White House nor the State Department have issued statements clearly denouncing the carnage—though they vigorously condemned election irregularities in Georgia and Ukraine, where no such killings took place. Instead, the White House spokesman made a mealy-mouthed plea for “restraint” on both sides, even as the Uzbekistan regime was gathering the corpses from the Andijan square.

The demonstrators in Andijan took to the streets to demand jobs and an end to political repression. Yet the US administration evinced no sympathy for their struggle. Instead, it blamed them for the violence and voiced concern that the political prisoners liberated from the Andijan jail included “terrorists.”

Washington’s concern for “democracy” and the struggle against “tyranny” in the former Soviet Union and internationally extends only to those countries where it seeks to overturn existing regimes and impose new ones committed to US geopolitical aims. In Uzbekistan, it already has a client state. Karimov may be a murderous dictator, the Bush administration reasons, but he’s ours.

This is a regime that imprisons over 6,000 political dissidents, systematically uses torture and has been known to boil its opponents alive. It is among the most

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corrupt dictatorships on the face of the planet.

Yet from even before the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington and the subsequent war in Afghanistan, it has enjoyed the closest ties with the United States government.

After 9/11, the US Congress granted Karimov's regime $25 million in loans to buy US weapons and equipment, anther $40.5 million in economic and law enforcement aid and $18 million in "anti-terrorism funding." This aid has increased steadily every year since.

By 2003, the aid had grown to $86 million. The following year, the State Department announced a largely symbolic cut of $18 million based on a 2002 Congressional decision tying aid to Uzbekistan's human rights record and political reforms. The Karimov regime was non-plussed, and officials said that the funding would find its way to the country in any case on a piecemeal basis.

Included in the US aid programs has been the training of Uzbek officers at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and the provision of military trucks. The results could be seen in Friday's massacre and the subsequent disposal of the bodies.

Visiting Uzbekistan last year, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld praised the Karimov regime for its "stalwart, steadfast support in our efforts against terrorism" and credited it with playing a major role in "our effort to liberate the people of Afghanistan."

One might well ask what kind of "liberation" can come from a regime that tortures and murders its own people. As for its collaboration in the "efforts against terrorism," Karimov's police state has consistently invoked such efforts as the pretext for its brutal repression of any and all manifestations of political opposition.

The services this odious regime provides Washington include the use of a large US military base at Karshi-Khanabad, near the long border with Afghanistan, where some 1,500 American military personnel are stationed, providing a supply route to Afghanistan and a means of projecting US military force into the rest of Central Asia and its influence over the oil-rich Caspian Basin.

At the same time, the Uzbek regime's hated intelligence service collaborates with the Pentagon and the CIA. While formally lamenting Uzbekistan's atrocious human rights record, Washington is regularly "rendering" people detained in the so-called global war on terrorism to the country, precisely because it knows that they will be tortured there.

Testifying before a US House of Representatives committee hearing last June, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Mira Ricardel praised the Uzbek regime, touting "impressive reforms under way in Uzbekistan's armed forces."

She went on to declare Karimov's police state "a model for other countries in the region" and "a valued partner and friend of the United States."

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