

ian recalled to *The Washington Post* this week Nigerian soldiers whipping Liberians with electrical wire.

Given their performance, it is not surprising that the Nigerian-led interventions were not wholly successful. Though they succeeded in establishing short-term peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone, the warfare in both countries never fully ceased. In fact, Taylor was able to use the continuing fighting in Liberia to amass greater power and destabilize the region further by inciting rebellions in neighboring states.

**H**ISTORY MAY SOON repeat itself. One of the Nigerian battalions that landed in Monrovia served in Sierra Leone. They, and the other Nigerian troops who will follow, are not paid much better than they were in the '90s and therefore have just as much economic incentive to loot. And the Nigerians have rejected any formal efforts to investigate, and possibly learn from, their crimes. In mid-July, Human Rights Watch made seven formal recommendations for peacekeepers entering Liberia, including a request to deploy advisers knowledgeable about humanitarian law alongside peacekeeping forces. Janet Fleischman, Washington director for Africa at Human Rights Watch, says there has been no indication that West African peacekeepers will respond to this request. What's more, although ECOWAS pledged an investigation into peacekeepers' atrocities in Sierra Leone, no such audit has been conducted.

The Bush administration is doing little to prevent the Nigerians from repeating their bad behavior. It has allotted only \$10 million in military aid to ECOWAS for the new Liberian peacekeeping efforts, not enough money to seriously boost the Nigerian troops' pay. It has not pushed ECOWAS forces to include human rights advisers with their contingents or to conduct an assessment of past behavior. Worst of all, despite deploying three Marine ships off the coast of Liberia, the administration has refused to allow any American officers to take joint leadership of the peacekeeping mission, a move that would make it far less likely that Nigerian officers raised in a ruthless military culture would be able to torture, murder, and steal from civilians. The Bush administration seems to think that, in Liberia, West African troops will act decently and effectively without the United States taking the lead. Perhaps they should ask Peter Bonner Jallah. ■

## Tashkent Dispatch Steppe Back

BY ROBERT TEMPLER

**I**F YOU DOUBT our achievements, look at our buildings." This is the slogan of the moment in Uzbekistan, painted in letters three feet high on banners in the capital, Tashkent. Uzbekistan's president, Islam Karimov, likes to think of himself as a latter-day Tamerlane, the conquering Central Asian emperor of the fourteenth century who uttered the phrase to boast of his extraordinary azure-tiled mosques. But the vast new ministries of the Uzbek capital, all mirrored glass and cheap moldings, hardly recall the grandeur of Central Asia's past. Instead, Tashkent's joyless boulevards, high fences, and bombastic palaces feel like Baghdad in better days.

It's not just the pompous architecture that evokes Iraq. Uzbekistan under Karimov is becoming an increasingly repressive and impoverished place, with a horrible human rights record. Economic power has been grabbed by a tiny corrupt elite who have enriched themselves on the back of an exploitative cotton industry. At least 6,000 people are in prison for their religious beliefs. Men who venture outside their homes wearing skullcaps and beards are arrested for being "wahhabis," the local term for anyone who spends too much time at the mosque. The police extract confessions through torture, and compliant judges sentence dissidents to lengthy terms in Jaslyk, a notorious prison camp where last year two religious detainees were boiled to death. An accident with a kettle, the government says. An example of systematic abuse of prisoners, says the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Torture.

Once, American conservatives allied themselves with Islamic extremists in Central Asia to fight Leonid Brezhnev's Soviet Union. Now, they are eagerly developing a friendship with a ruler little different than Brezhnev to fight Islamic extremists. In exchange for U.S. use of an isolated air base in southern Uzbekistan, Karimov has received hundreds of millions of dollars in assistance and a free ride on human rights and economic reform. Uzbekistan has agreed to make some minor political and economic adjustments, yet the past year has seen the Karimov government's repression and economic mismanagement worsen. The response from Washington has been silence and more money. This is money badly spent: U.S. support for Karimov will backfire, hurting U.S. interests in the region.

Conservatives have begun touting Karimov. As Stephen Schwartz wrote in a recent issue of *The Weekly Standard*,

*Robert Templer is Asia program director of the International Crisis Group.*

**&c.**

The daily journal of politics, updated continuously.

Only at [www.tnr.com/etc](http://www.tnr.com/etc)



the United States “must support the Uzbeks in their internal as well as their external combat, and must repudiate the blandishments of the human rights industry.”

But, far from helping in the fight against terrorism, this support is likely to spawn new extremists. Alan Kreuger, a Princeton economics professor, and Jitka Maleckova, a Middle East expert at Charles University in Prague, have found that, while it is difficult to demonstrate links between terrorism and poverty or education, there is a close correlation between countries producing terrorists and having a poor record of political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House ranked Uzbekistan just a little above Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. This year, the Heritage Foundation and *The Wall Street Journal* put it one hundred forty-ninth on their joint rankings of economic freedom in 156 countries—worse than Burma. Indeed, Uzbekistan’s mix of political and economic repression; underground Islamic movements; and a youthful, disillusioned, and unemployed population could prove fertile ground for terrorist recruiters.

There are some legitimate security concerns in Uzbekistan, but Karimov has blown them out of proportion to justify his hard-line rule. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a militant group the White House labeled as terrorist even before September 11, 2001, was decimated fighting alongside the Taliban in fall 2001. An underground group of Islamists known as Hizb-ut-Tahrir have never advocated violence in their call for a Central Asian Islamic caliphate.

These groups have relatively little backing right now, but their popular support is growing—mostly because of Karimov. The concentration of wealth and power in an ever-smaller number of hands close to the president, combined with increasing repression and a weakening economy, is fueling widespread discontent that could turn violent. Visiting officials who lecture Karimov on his economic failures are firmly reminded that his education was in the dismal science. Indeed, during Soviet times, he worked at the Uzbek branch of Gosplan, the central planning agency, where he shuffled goods from one unproductive factory to another while skimming a cut. That’s still how he sees economic management. Last year, he effectively closed down Uzbekistan’s bazaars, the wholesale markets that are the center of commerce, in an attempt, many believe, to enrich members of the government trying to control wholesale trade. He has had the government buy back, at their original price, businesses that were privatized years ago. Many businesses that are then taken over by families of politicians.

But economic mismanagement is only part of a pattern of ultimately self-destructive behavior by Karimov. He has fomented a rebellion in Tajikistan, armed Abdurashid Dostum—a particularly vicious warlord in Afghanistan—and even bombed villages in Kyrgyzstan, a country he feels has been too lax in tackling Islamic groups. He has mined the once permeable borders of his country so that farmers visiting their cousins in neighboring countries across the hills have had their feet blown off. He has virtually closed Uzbekistan’s borders to trade. Meanwhile, the corrupt and

powerful benefit from their complete control over the few flourishing areas of the economy, such as cotton production.

All this has helped the radicals. For most people in Uzbekistan, particularly farmers, there is the same drudgery and abusive state control that existed under the Soviet Union but none of the educational or economic opportunities, medical care, or Black Sea vacations. During Soviet times, Uzbekistan was a well-developed industrial center, because Stalin placed heavy industry far from any frontier that could be overrun during a war. All that has gone, the victim of failed economic policies. Former mining towns, such as Angren at the edge of the Ferghana Valley, appear almost completely dead. There is no visible economy, no shops, no market stalls. Enterprising men go to Russia to work. Unfortunate young women get lured into jobs “waitressing” in Dubai.

As a result, across the country there is an increasing sense of economic failure, political paralysis, and popular discontent. It is now easy to find men in Tashkent who, though fond of their vodka and pork sausages, are drawn to the IMU, which had been a feeble movement, because the IMU is one of the only groups that has ever stood up to the government. Underground mosques are gaining in popularity, since they, like the IMU, are one of the only avenues open to people who wish to express their discontent over Karimov’s corruption and mismanagement.

It might make more sense for the United States to tolerate Karimov’s misrule if Uzbekistan were delivering important assets. But the long-term risks of uncritical support for Karimov, who has nothing in common with the United States other than a shared fear of Islamic extremism, do not outweigh the limited strategic benefits of a base in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek base is of little help to the Pentagon in the war on terrorism, since it already has bases in Afghanistan from which it can battle Al Qaeda offshoots, as well as in Kyrgyzstan for operations in other parts of Central Asia.

**K**ARIMOV, HOWEVER, IS prospering on the back of his new relationship with the United States. He can now ignore diplomats who, several years ago, used to raise concerns about human rights abuses and lack of economic reform. In 2002, the State Department issued a limp statement criticizing a fraudulent referendum Karimov held to extend his term in office. Two days after the statement was released, a senior American official announced a tripling of aid for Uzbekistan. Like Hosni Mubarak and other despots who regard themselves as indispensable to Washington, Karimov only has to make the occasional concession to the United States: A few prisoners may be released ahead of a presidential visit to Washington or a new nongovernmental organization may be allowed to register just as a U.S. aid package is under consideration.

The sort of real changes that are needed—changes that might bring democracy and economic opportunity to Uzbeks—will never occur as long as Karimov is running the country. And so a population that aspires to all things that the United States offers is starting to become sullen and re-

sentful at the unquestioning support Washington gives their dictator. Moderate Muslims who want to worship in peace are finding all forms of religious expression and political opposition closed off to them except the underground mosques. Middle-class families are being squeezed out of their businesses by a rapaciously corrupt elite. Young men with no prospects are turning bitter and disillusioned. We know how this story ends. ■

## Jerusalem Dispatch

# Third Way

BY YOSSI KLEIN HALEVI

**I**N THE KNESSET office of Yosef "Tommy" Lapid, justice minister and head of the ultra-secular Shinui Party, there is a painting based on a famous photograph of Theodor Herzl gazing into the distance. In the painting, Herzl sees a whimsical Israeli landscape—part Levantine, part Western—of cacti, camels, and sleek cars. Herzl, a Eurocentric secularist who advocated a Zionism of refuge, is an apt icon for Lapid, a Holocaust survivor who sees the decline in Israel's Westernization—the result of a rising ultra-Orthodox population—as a threat to Israel's edge over the Arab world.

Herzl, Zionism's ultimate consensus figure, is an appropriate image for another reason. In recent months, the anti-ultra-Orthodox, Ashkenazi-dominated Shinui, the country's third-largest party after Likud and Labor, has come to embody mainstream Israel. While the Likud wavers over Ariel Sharon's concessions and the farther right, pro-settler National Religious Party and National Union oppose negotiations altogether, Shinui is the only party within Sharon's governing coalition that unequivocally supports the prime minister's dual policy of toughness on security and flexibility on territory. And, aside from Sharon himself, Lapid is arguably the politician who now most closely reflects the instincts of average Israelis. He was right-wing in the 1980s—he suggested placing car bombs in Palestinian cities to retaliate for terrorist attacks—and became a supporter of the Oslo process in the 1990s. And now he's a combination of the two: ready for a deal but not quite sure it's attainable, no matter what Israel concedes. He supports a Palestinian state but not the redivision of Jerusalem, advocating instead Palestinian autonomy in parts of the city under Israeli rule. Asked whether a final settlement is possible without dividing Jerusalem, he replies, "I don't believe in a solution with a capital S. Instead, there are a hundred solutions. [Other] peoples have lived together and occasionally massacred each other, but in between there are long periods of stability. A conflict like ours can last generations."

Positioning Shinui as the party of the Israeli center is crucial to Lapid's goal of transforming it into the Knesset's second-largest faction, displacing Labor, which currently has 19 seats to Shinui's 15. When Lapid took over Shinui—then a tiny, failing party—in the late '90s, he transformed it into a controversial one-issue protest movement against ultra-Orthodox privileges, such as wholesale draft deferments. Lapid correctly identified the combination of ultra-Orthodox demographic growth and ultra-Orthodox political power as a long-term threat to democratic, Westernized, secular Israel. And, in government, Lapid's party is using its power to ensure that ultra-Orthodox parties are denied access to patronage and budgets, strategies that may force the ultra-Orthodox closer to the Israeli mainstream. As the ultra-Orthodox community receives less help from the state, it may rethink its insistence on confining its young men to the yeshiva, rather than letting them join the workforce and the military. Ultimately, Lapid is convinced that, as the peace process intensifies, the farther right parties in Sharon's coalition will quit and be replaced by Labor and that the "secular revolution" Shinui has promised its supporters, including the introduction of civil marriage and divorce, will finally occur.

But, even as he pursues his secularist goals, Lapid has broadened Shinui's appeal as the party of the liberal, Ashkenazi middle class. Beyond opposing ultra-Orthodox power, Shinui has expanded its agenda to fight for middle-class economic causes, such as preventing tuition increases for university students. At the same time, Lapid has openly backed the liberal social causes supported by many middle-class Israelis. "I'm for free trade, free press, free love," says Lapid, who was the only government minister to appear at Tel Aviv's recent gay pride parade.

It's a strategy that seems to be working. Shinui more than doubled its seats in the Knesset in the January elections, and, today, with Labor leaderless, it draws more and more liberal Israelis. One recent Likud-commissioned poll showed that Shinui would win more seats than Labor if elections were held today.

**L**APID'S ANTI-PATHY TO religion and his passionate patriotism come from the same source: his experience as a child survivor. At age twelve, he saw Gestapo agents take away his father, a leader of the local Yugoslavian Jewish community. "I lost my God [then]," he has said. Later, he and his mother were rounded up with other Jews and marched toward a river to be shot. A Russian plane appeared, and everyone scattered. Mother and son hid in a public bathroom; when they emerged, the death march had moved on. "At that moment, I became a Zionist, because I understood that there had to be at least one place for a Jewish child."

Before becoming one of Israel's most controversial politicians, Lapid was one of its most controversial journalists. He was famous for outrageous one-liners, such as accusing Yitzhak Rabin's daughter of building her political

© 2003 The New Republic. All rights reserved. Copyright of New Republic is the property of TNR II, LLC and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.