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US foreign policy dictates that Orban is a fall guy

Sir, Your obituary for Islam Karimov, president of Uzbekistan (“Implacable dictator whose brutality kept him in power”, September 3) is a reminder of the moral double standards of US (and western) foreign policy.

As you suggest, Karimov ruled his country with brutality for nearly three decades. Because of his atrocious human rights record and ruthless crushing of any political dissent, Karimov became an international pariah. Indeed, the US overreaction to 9/11 was a godsend for him, given his country’s proximity to Afghanistan.

After 9/11, President Bush welcomed Karimov to the White House, allowing Central Asia’s nastiest despot to reap big political and economic benefits from the US war in Afghanistan. In exchange for leasing rights on a military air base in Uzbekistan and logistical support for western military supplies to Afghanistan, Karimov suddenly became a good boy in Washington.

Fast-forward 15 years to March 2016 when Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, the authoritarian leader of an oil-rich country, is welcomed in Washington by vice-president Joe Biden, secretary of state John Kerry and congressional leaders. In a smart move, Mr. Aliyev freed 10 per cent of the country’s political prisoners before his visit.

Now enter prime minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, an ally of the US. During six years in office, Mr. Orban has not been invited to the White House for a single bilateral discussion. Why? Because of Hungary’s “democracy deficit” under Mr. Orban. This is double standards. This is what happens when US foreign policy values military cooperation and oil politics above else.

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