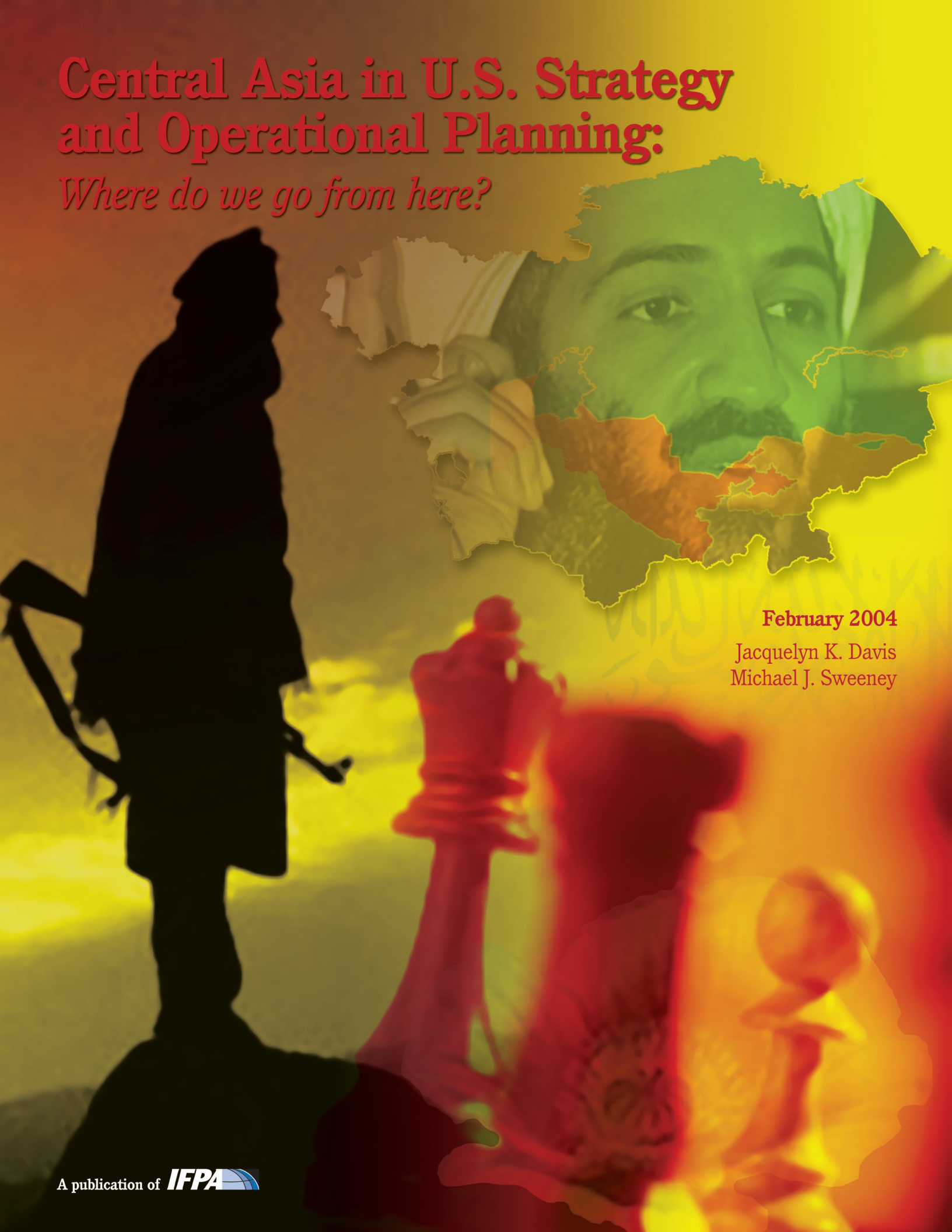
Central Asia in U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning:

Where do we go from here?



February 2004

Jacquelyn K. Davis
Michael J. Sweeney

A publication of IFPA

Central Asia in U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning:

Where do we go from here?

February 2004

Jacquelyn K. Davis
Michael J. Sweeney

A publication of

IFPA
The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis

The Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis
1725 DeSales Street, NW, Suite 402
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-463-7942

Central Asia in U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning:

Where do we go from here?

Table of Contents

Executive Summary ..... **i**

Chapter I: Introduction **1**

Chapter II: Defining Central Asia **5**

Chapter III: Partnership with "Stalin's Heirs" **15**

Chapter IV: Central Asia as a Front in the "War of Ideas" **29**

Chapter V: The Smuggling of Illicit Materials **41**

Chapter VI: U.S. Presence in Central Asia:
Meshing Policy and Operational Requirements **47**

Chapter VII: Regional Perspectives on U.S. Presence in Central Asia **63**

Chapter VIII: Final Thoughts and Recommendations **77**

Executive Summary

In the aftermath of the September 11th attacks, the United States intensified its relations with a number of Central Asian states. This region had long been regarded as Russia's "backyard," but with the demise of Soviet/Russian power and in the face of the evident need to confront the Taliban for its support of the Al Qaeda terrorist network, U.S. interests and military-operational priorities dictated the need to deepen U.S. involvement with Central Asia, to include the establishment of bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Since the autumn of 2001, U.S. policy towards this potentially volatile region of the world has been more ad hoc than well-reasoned in terms of future implications for U.S. strategic interests. This must change if the United States is to avoid getting itself enmeshed in another "Iran-like" situation.

In reconceptualizing our approach to Central Asia, the United States must adhere to two strategic imperatives. First, it must continue to delineate and separate Central Asia from the Caucasus. Forcing a tight linkage between the Caucasus and Central Asia is limiting in that it discourages more creative thought about how each of these areas of the world relates to more natural neighboring connections – specifically, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia in the case of Central Asia. For its part, the Caucasus itself is perhaps more aptly seen as a broader element of the Black Sea littoral zone and as the "end" of Europe, rather than as an adjunct of Asia or as a riparian of the Caspian Sea.

Second, and related, the United States must continue to move beyond the view of the Caspian as a focal point for security in "Eurasia." The Caspian's hydrocarbon reserves are important to world energy markets, but they are not revolutionary; more to the point, they will not come even close

to obviating continued reliance on the Persian Gulf as the primary oil and gas producing region of the world. The Caspian should thus not be considered the linchpin of U.S. strategy towards either the Caucasus or Central Asia. Indeed, to the extent that energy issues enter into debates over policy options, it should be in the context of discussions as to how energy wealth can be used to stabilize the weak states along the Caspian littoral and inhibit the declines in living standards that provide fertile recruiting grounds for radical Islam and other extremist ideologies.

The focus commanded by the Caspian diverted attention away from more worrisome trends in Central Asia. All five of the former Soviet Central Asian states are deeply corrupt regimes, with each president running his own extensive personal patronage network. This has resulted in a growing chasm between "have's" and "have not's"; while those closest to the Central Asian leaders have accumulated enormous wealth, average Central Asians have seen their standard of living decline in almost every manner imaginable since the collapse of Soviet control. From basic sanitation to quality of health care, the Central Asian states have experienced precipitous and worrisome regression over the past decade. Perhaps most disturbing of all, literacy rates and the overall quality of education in Central Asia has declined steadily since 1991.

The people of Central Asia have suffered the societal breakdown and economic adversity seen in many other post-communist countries, but with little prospect for improvement in the long run. Meanwhile, their governments have increasingly relied on repressive security measures, controls on and intimidation of the press, and rule by presidential fiat. The combination of economic hardship and political repression provides ample breeding grounds for extremist Islamic movements.

The two most prominent extremist groups – Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HTI) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – have both focused their activities primarily against the regime of Uzbek President Islam Karimov. This places the United States in the uncomfortably familiar position of its principal military ally in a Muslim region being a corrupt, secular authoritarian opposed by Islamic fundamentalist forces. Operation *Enduring Freedom* is believed to have severely weakened the IMU, destroying much of its training infrastructure and weapons stocks and, perhaps most significantly, killing its charismatic military leader, Djuma Namangani. Still, many Uzbek officials worry about an IMU resurgence and point out that the movement's spiritual and political leader, Tohir Yuldeshev, remains at large in the Afghan-Pakistani border regions.

The HTI, meanwhile, professes to employ only non-violent means in the pursuit of its objective: establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia in which *shari'a* law prevails. Although there is no evidence that the HTI has eschewed its non-violent nature, the movement is nonetheless worrying given its avowed goal, as well as its strident anti-Americanism; HTI propaganda portrays the United States as the leading force in a Western campaign to undermine and destroy Islam.

A basic question for Central Asian security is whether the HTI – or more accurately those individuals and groups that currently adhere to its ideology – are willing to remain non-violent indefinitely. Further radicalization and militarization of Islamist movements within Central Asia would only deepen the strategic conundrum Washington already confronts: partnership with regimes needed for base access to combat terrorism diminishes perceptions of the United States as a liberal-minded and benevolent superpower, potentially lending credence to Islamic extremist characterizations of the United States as a cynical, self-serving power.

Mounting anti-American sentiments also point to the need to reconsider current U.S. public diplomacy efforts (or lack thereof) towards Central Asia. In recent months, senior administration officials have launched a concerted effort to call openly for real democratic reforms in the Middle East, including in states such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia that heretofore had been exempt from criticism due to their strategic relationships with the United States. Increased calls for political liberalization in the Middle East are, in part, a manifestation of the administration's campaign to win the so-called "war of ideas," a crucial component of the war on terror. Part and parcel of the administration's approach to the "war of ideas" is a public diplomacy strategy aimed at countering the perception of a United States indifferent to the political and economic hardships of everyday citizens in the Arab and Muslim worlds.

This new tack in policy raises questions with regard to the U.S. approach in Central Asia. It can easily (if somewhat simplistically) be argued that we are callously repeating our errors in Central Asia at the very moment we are attempting to correct past indiscretions in the Middle East. Although the United States has pumped significant economic and security assistance into Central Asia, everyday Central Asians are more likely to perceive these funds as pay-offs, propping up regional autocrats in exchange for military access. If the United States is serious about fighting

the "war of ideas" on all fronts, a more concerted public diplomacy campaign is needed to engage and persuade the peoples of Central Asia.

The United States must also be willing to step up behind-the-scenes pressure on our partners in Central Asia to effect real political and economic change. This is particularly needed in Uzbekistan, a country in which the United States invested nearly half a billion dollars in the eleven months following the deployment of U.S. forces on Uzbek soil. The Uzbek government has committed itself, in a five-point strategic partnership agreement signed in Washington in March 2002, to pursuing serious democratic and economic reforms. In practice, though, Uzbekistan has offered only token gestures toward these ends. The United States needs to do a better job of holding Karimov's feet to the fire on the pursuit of genuine economic and political reform. Aside from the current regime "tarring" the United States by association, a truly democratic, stable Uzbekistan – or at least an Uzbekistan with strong, functional rule-of-law structures – would be an effective and important partner in providing for the long-term stability of Inner Asia.

A strong case can be made that diversifying U.S. presence among other Central Asian states could increase U.S. flexibility (operationally and diplomatically) while affording greater leverage to encourage constructive changes by Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan is an interesting option as an alternate partner, as its economic and political assets make it the Central Asian country with the best prospect for establishing something close to a rule-of-law state in the mid term. Admittedly, vibrant, functional democracy in Kazakhstan might be some time off, but a quasi-free oligarchy similar to Putin's Russia might be within its grasp and, for Central Asia, this would be a marked improvement.

In recommending a diversification of posture in Central Asia, the intent is not to call for a massive build up of new facilities. With another round of Base Realignment and Closing (BRAC) looming on the U.S. domestic horizon, there is little political appetite for attempting to justify vast construction costs at new overseas facilities. However, in the context of current planning in the Department of Defense (DoD) for the realignment of the U.S. global military posture, large main bases are being de-emphasized as a priority. Rather, the focus is on less permanent facilities, pre-positioning of equipment, and even on so-called "warm" areas, where the United States only deploys periodically but maintains "skeleton infrastructure." Though

the nomenclature within the Pentagon is still developing, the terms "forward operating bases (FOBs)" and "forward operating locations (FOLs)" are most commonly associated with the notion of more austere, scaled down, semi-permanent bases. The FOBs would entail limited, fixed infrastructure and semi-permanent deployments of troops, unaccompanied by dependents; the FOLs would be the "warm areas" that would only be occupied intermittently. Using this new parlance, our recommendation for Central Asia is to establish at least one alternate FOB in Kazakhstan, at the most suitable of the three airfields where we now have emergency landing privileges – Almaty, Chimkent, or Lugovoi. The other two sites should become FOLs, and there should also be a deliberate effort to establish one or more FOLs in Tajikistan.

As it undertakes to revamp its posture in Central Asia, the United States will also need to reassess the priorities attached to its military deployments, including those first undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th attacks. While developments in Afghanistan and Iraq – including the success or failure of NATO to assume a greater burden for peacekeeping missions beyond the Kabul area – ultimately will dictate the extent to which U.S. forces can be diverted to other missions beyond those related to stability operations and the pursuit of senior Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, in time, the United States could reap important benefits from directing national resources against the Central and South Asian drug trade. Not only would doing so undercut an essential revenue source for extremist organizations, but the monitoring and disruption of narcotics trafficking networks also might benefit efforts to interdict transfers of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through the Asian interior, possibly preventing terrorist groups from obtaining and employing these weapons. These taskings also argue for at least exploring whether facilities in Tajikistan might be a desireable addition to the U.S. Central Asian footprint, given Tajikistan's prominent role in drug trafficking through the region.

We agree that the United States must maintain a presence in Central Asia for the indefinite future, but it also should never allow itself to be "held hostage" by any one state or facility. It is worth remembering that while Central Asian facilities were important to the conduct of Operation *Enduring Freedom*, access through Pakistan was essential. Partnership with Pakistan, of course, presents its own set of problems, as the attempts on President Pervez Musharraf's life in December 2003 illustrate. If Pakistan were to suffer a coup or revolution that ended our access

to its facilities, there would be few good options available for replacing them. Central Asian facilities would have limited utility in making up for the loss, at least in the context of pursuing terrorists in the Pakistani-Afghan border region. The United States needs to consider other alternatives and that dictates seriously examining options in India, as well as further developing the concept of sea-basing with an eye towards its applicability to future scenarios in South Asia and elsewhere along the Indian Ocean littoral.

A sound U.S. Strategy towards Central Asia

On the basis of the analysis contained in this study, it is possible to lay out specific steps and policy choices that the United States should consider with respect to its strategy towards Central Asia. We hope that they will serve as a point of departure for further debate among the policy community on the direction and nature of U.S. strategy towards Central Asia.

- *Continue to support development of nationally oriented civil society in Central Asia.* The development of strong, functional, secular political organizations in Central Asia remains a primary challenge for ensuring long-term stability in this region. The United States should continue to support grassroots efforts focused on human rights defense and other issues which may eventually resonate with public opinion and which, over time, could provide the basis for cohesive political movements capable of acting as a functional opposition to the ruling regime in states like Uzbekistan.

- *Begin establishing closer security links with Kazakhstan.* While we should not rush to christen Kazakhstan as "the Georgia of Central Asia," it nonetheless appears to have the best prospects for political and economic development over the long term. President Nursultan Nazarbayev and his inner circle remain a real impediment to change, but movements such as the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (PCK) and *Ak Zhol* constitute the brightest (albeit imperfect) hopes for a functional opposition to a Central Asian government.

- *Give Uzbekistan a January 2006 deadline to demonstrate real progress on economic and political reform.* Convey privately to the Uzbek leadership that if it is to remain an important regional partner of the United States, it has to show real commitment – and not simply token gestures – to the establishment of a functional, rule-of-law state. If substantive steps in this

direction are not forthcoming in the next twenty-four months, the United States should be prepared to leave Kharshi-Khanabad by the end of 2005 and redeploy its forces either in Kazakhstan or at another facility in the region that makes best operational sense depending on the situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan at that time.

- *Consider options for responding proactively in the event of opportunities for change in Turkmenistan.* Given his physical ailments and Orwellian regime, it is easy to postulate that Turkmen President Supramurat Niyazov may depart the scene suddenly, through natural or other causes. In this event, there might be a short window for the United States and the international community to act to support a normalization of life for the Turkmen people and to support a reconstruction of Turkmen institutions along rule-of-law lines. We should begin considering our response now, as the turmoil surrounding the Turkmen despot's departure also could create opportunities for unwanted outcomes – such as the rise of a younger dictator or unwelcome meddling by Tehran or Moscow.

- *Apply U.S. national resources towards the interdiction of the drug trade in Central and South Asia.* The United States needs to begin implementing the "three-pronged" approach to counter-drug policy in Central and South Asia that it has adopted in Latin America. That is, military interdiction efforts need to be combined with promotion of alternate cash crops and with the development of effective local law enforcement capabilities. Such an effort has the potential, in the near term, to be resource intensive. This is why, as well, the United States needs to attract international support for this objective, calling upon the G-8 nations and its allies in the war on terror to participate in a comprehensive Central Asian counter-drug effort. Considering the vital role the opiate trade plays in funding extremist terrorist organizations, greater application of U.S. military force (and other instruments of national power) to this task will be a sound investment.

- *Identify Central Asia as a priority area for the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).* With its robust smuggling networks, Central Asia is an ideal conduit for transfers of WMD-related components and technologies. As the United States and its partners continue to work towards operationalizing the PSI, Central Asia therefore needs to be identified as a priority area for internationally coordinated counter-proliferation efforts. Advanced U.S. intelligence,

surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets need to be programmed for long-term use in Central Asia to assist in this endeavor (as well as to support counter-drug operations).

- *Transform the U.S. "footprint" formula in Central Asia*. Overall, the combination of "white" SOF units working with regional militaries on counter-drug efforts coupled with the application of U.S. ISR assets to tasks related to narcotics/proliferation interdiction points to a scaled-down U.S. presence in Central Asia, less focused on combat forces and based more on small-footprint assets at opposite ends of the technological spectrum. This combination can maximize the U.S. contribution to regional security while limiting both the number of forces and the amount of infrastructure we require.

- *Incorporate Central Asia directly into public diplomacy statements on democracy in the Muslim world.* U.S. silence on democracy in Central Asia stands in obvious contrast to the administration's new approach towards the Middle East. Central Asia should receive equal billing in subsequent statements by senior administration officials on the need for political change in key states of the Muslim world.

- *Be willing to accept Chinese and Russian interests in Central Asia so long as they do not impede core objectives in the war against terrorism.* The United States should not allow itself to fall into the trap of viewing involvement in Central Asia through either a Cold War paradigm or Great Game construct that encourages a zero-sum interpretation of geopolitical developments. Both China and Russia have their own interests in seeing this region stabilized and in supporting the defeat of Islamic extremism. There might be diplomatic benefits (in Central Asia itself and on other regional and global issues) to engaging Moscow and Beijing more actively in Central Asia. Joint exercises between NATO/U.S. forces and Russian units stationed in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan could be one avenue for exploring cooperation; the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's proposed anti-terrorism center in Tashkent might be another vehicle for promoting collaborative efforts.

- *Look to India as a long-term partner in both South and Central Asia.* While continuing to buttress the current Pakistani regime to the extent feasible, the United States should proceed with deepening its security relationship with India, up to and including the establishment

of austere, semi-permanent bases (FOLs) as a hedging step against the potential loss of Pakistani basing infrastructure.

- *Leverage the potential of robust sea-basing to support U.S. strategic and operational objectives*. For much of the "arc of instability" and with respect to prosecuting the war on terror, the evolving sea-basing concept is projected to provide the United States with a means to access combat regions when forward basing is not available or when political constraints on U.S. access have been put in place by host nations. Sea-basing is not a panacea, but it is an option that we should develop as a national strategic asset.

Chapter I:
Introduction

In René Grousset's seminal work, *The Empire of the Steppes,* he notes that Central Asia's history has been defined by the interconnectedness of its peripheries; as one new people pushed into the Asian heartland – be they Persians, Turks, Arabs, Mongols, Chinese, or Russians – another was displaced. This, in turn, led to new clashes as the disrupted population inevitably imposed on the territory of others. Thus, when the Persians or Arabs entered from the West, the forebears of the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Mongols pressed on the Chinese; during periods of Chinese expansion, the inverse was true. In short, what happened in one part of Central Asia inevitably had a cascading effect across the plains and steppes of Inner Asia.[1]

As Central Asia's new power – and whether it was intentional or not that is increasingly the United States' status in the region – the lessons espoused by Grousset in chronicling the people of the steppe who lived and died long before the age of Genghis Khan are far more valuable than the oft-hyped comparisons to the British-Russian "Great Game" at the end of the nineteenth century. For the United States, the question – at least for the moment – is not whether it wields decisive power in Central Asia. The speed with which the Taliban was dispatched made plain that the United States is the preeminent military and political power, and, at least for the near-term future, there is no true competition for regional primacy. Rather, at issue is how the United States chooses to use its influence and how its presence in the region impacts 1) the states of Central Asia themselves, 2) the group of strategically important states that ring the region, and 3) the broader international Muslim community that is inextricably linked to both Central Asia and the U.S. presence therein.

---

1 René Grousset, *The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia*, Translated from the French by Naomi Walford, (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000) 687 pp.

In the two years since Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan opened their bases (and Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan opened their skies for overflight), the United States has essentially employed a "band aid" approach to both its military posture on the ground in Central Asia and its strategy towards the region more broadly. Such an ad hoc approach was both understandable and necessary in the wake of the stunning events of September 2001. Operation *Enduring Freedom* produced important initial successes in the war against terrorism by ousting the Taliban and dealing significant blows to the leadership and infrastructure of both Al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Nonetheless, it is increasingly apparent that a prolonged U.S. military presence will be required in Central Asia, even with the transition to NATO leadership of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Alliance assumption of a broader set of missions. At some level, U.S. troops will likely still be on the ground in Afghanistan itself and in supporting bases in Pakistan and the Central Asian states for at least the next few years to support stability and to continue the pursuit of Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders.

Ad hoc arrangements should therefore be reconsidered and a long-term plan developed for U.S. involvement in Central Asia, one that supports both military operational requirements in Central Asia and broader diplomatic strategy towards the region and its immediate neighbors. This monograph, undertaken with the generous support of the Smith Richardson Foundation, is an independent effort by the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis (IFPA) to enunciate the outlines of such a strategy and to explore those principal political and military factors that need to be taken into account while developing a plan for long-term U.S. involvement in Central Asia. It is intended that this study will serve as a point of departure for stimulating further debate – both inside government and among the private-sector community of academic and think tank experts on Central Asia – on the specific steps the United States should take with respect to its military posture in the region and its relations with specific Central Asian states.

Now is a particularly propitious time to undertake such a discussion. First, as we pass further into the second decade since the Soviet Union's demise, Central Asia is a region in flux. Differentiation among the five former Soviet Central Asia republics is increasing, as are the extent of their ties to states beyond the former Soviet Union (FSU). This ancient land is reasserting its importance as a pivotal region of the world, having survived the better part of seven decades as a "strategic

backwater" under Soviet rule. The changes and shifts taking place within the Central Asian states are strategically significant, even if (more often than not) they are for the worse.

Second, the United States is itself in the process of transforming and realigning its global force posture to adapt to the new challenges posed by global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Slowly, the United States is planning the redistribution of its forces away from the obsolete East-West pattern of confrontation to meet the new threats of the so-called "arc of instability" running roughly from the Andean mountains of the Western hemisphere, through sub-Saharan Africa, into the Middle East and Central Asia and concluding in Southeast Asia. The final details of the proposed base restructuring have yet to be publicly released in full. However, those elements of the realignment strategy – such as plans to withdraw U.S. forces back from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Korea – that have been disclosed indicate major changes are in the offing.[2] Central Asian facilities could play an important role in redeploying U.S. forces to meet terrorist and WMD threats, not only in Central Asia itself, but as part of a broader global security network.

2 Vernon Loeb, "New Bases Reflect Shift in Military: Smaller Facilities Sought for Quick Strikes," *Washington Post,* June 9, 2003, p. A01.

Subsequent chapters examine current and potential security challenges in Central Asia; the U.S. footprint in the region and hypothetical options for expanding or contracting U.S. military presence; the benefits and limitations of each of the five Central Asian states as military partners for the United States; and the impact of U.S. regional presence on the strategies and interests of key neighboring states, such as China, India, and Russia. For each chapter, we provide insights into how specific factors or trends in Central Asia should affect U.S. thinking and strategy towards the region. The final chapter ties together our analyses of the myriad elements at work in the Central Asian security equation and proposes specific recommendations for crafting U.S. strategy towards Central Asia for the mid to long term, to include how best to structure our military forces within the region.

In addition to extensive archival research, this project was informed by interviews conducted during June of 2003 in Tashkent, with senior officials from the Uzbek Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs and scholars at Uzbekistan's Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies (ISRS), among others. As well, a strategy brainstorming session was convened shortly after this research effort began, featuring keynote remarks by Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski. That session, held on March 26, 2003 in Washington, DC, examined the overall situation in Central Asia and the potential parameters of a coherent and effective U.S. policy towards the region. A small group of independent scholars were invited to participate in the roundtable discussion, as were select officials from the intelligence community, the State Department, and the Joint Staff. The insights raised during this brainstorming session were an important springboard for this project; however, the views expressed in this study are those of the authors alone and should not necessarily be construed as being shared by any of the public or private sector attendees at the March 26th event.

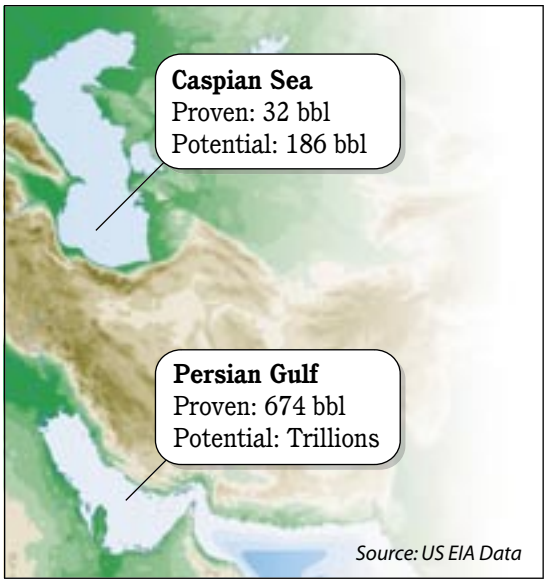
Chapter II:
Defining Central Asia

A necessary first step towards crafting a more effective long-term U.S. strategy towards Central Asia is to distinguish the region – defined as the five former Soviet Central Asian republics – from the broader concept of "Eurasia," a blanket term employed by the U.S. government since the end of the Cold War to describe U.S. involvement in two distinct regions of the world – the Caucasus and Central Asia. Connections certainly exist between these two regions and, on the specific issue of military basing, the air corridor through the Caucasus (and especially Georgia) has clear relevance to the sustainment of forces at land bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (as well as in Afghanistan itself). But forcing a tight linkage between the Caucasus and Central Asia is, from our perspective, limiting in that it discourages more creative thought about how each of these areas of the world relates to more natural neighboring connections – specifically, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia in the case of Central Asia. For its part, the Caucasus itself is perhaps more aptly seen as a broader element of the Black Sea littoral zone and as the "end" of Europe, rather than as an adjunct of Asia or as a riparian of the Caspian Sea, the designation with which it has primarily been identified since the collapse of the Soviet Union.[3]

That the Caucasus has been mainly linked with the Caspian and not the Black Sea is largely a by-product of the energy industry's effort to promote the Caspian's hydrocarbon reserves as the dominant factor in shaping U.S. and other international engagement with the states of "Eurasia." As discussed below, the energy potential of the Caspian has in large measure been exaggerated,

3 Particularly in terms of efforts to promote long-term stability and democracy in the Caucasus, that region's linkages to Turkey, the Balkans, NATO, and the European Union are far more relevant than its connection to Central Asia or even the Middle East, although with respect to the latter, there may be interest in how the Caucasus can be employed to bring pressure to bear on certain Middle Eastern states, such as Iran.

Comparison of Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf Oil Reserves
Proven and Potential



a phenomenon that helped to give energy and pipeline issues unnecessary predominance in U.S. relations with some states in both the Caucasus and Central Asia. More broadly, the world's early fixation on the Caspian's potential to trump the strategic importance of the Persian Gulf helped to obscure the more unsettling domestic security trends at work in Central Asia.

From Energy to Security

Even before the attacks of September 11th, there was some understanding among military planners that "Eurasia" would be a priority in the twenty-first century security environment.[4] Still, much of this focus was again driven by the region's energy promise and the tendency to examine "Eurasia" was in part motivated by the need to find a geographic designation encompassing both sides of the Caspian, as the inland sea was viewed as the primary fulcrum around which regional security dynamics would pivot. The terrorist strikes against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon helped to cement the dawning realization among many analysts that the Caspian Basin was not the alpha and omega of Eurasia's security relevancy.

The prominent role played by Uzbekistan – a state marginal to considerations of Caspian energy wealth – in the wake of September 11th underscored the shift eastward in the focal point of Eurasian security dynamics. More importantly, the attacks drew increased attention to the dangers inherent in the region's long-term susceptibility to Islamic fundamentalist movements and the potential for one or more of the Central Asian states to succumb to fragmentation or failure and become the "next Afghanistan." With President Bush's inclusion of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in the same breath as Al Qaeda during his historic address to Congress

4 In 2000, the Joint Staff commissioned a net assessment of "Central Eurasia" undertaken jointly by the Atlantic Council of the United States and the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute (CACI) at Johns Hopkins University: Charles Fairbanks, C. Richard Nelson, S. Frederick Starr, and Kenneth Weisbrode, *Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia,* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council of the United States and the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, January 2001), 131 pp., www.acus.org/Publications/Default.htm. More recently, the U.S. Army commissioned a similar study by RAND: *Faultlines of Conflict in the Caucasus and Central Asia: Implications for the U.S. Army*, Olga Olikar and Thomas Szayna, eds., (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003), 407 pp., www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1598/index.html.

nine days after September 11th, it was apparent that Central Asia's primary relevance to U.S. security planning lay in its dual utility as a possible haven for terrorists and as a launching point for anti-terrorist operations.[5]

Reinforcing this notion was increased clarity on the limits of Caspian oil and gas. As the 1990s drew to a close, a critical mass of papers and articles were published questioning the conventional wisdom about the region's energy stocks.[6] Few disputed that the Caspian Basin could be a significant source of gas and oil, but hopes that it would obviate global dependence on the Persian Gulf abated. More realistic assessments of the Caspian's reserves came into focus and greater clarity was obtained on the difference between the region's *proven* reserves and *potential* output.

According to U.S. government data, the whole of the Caspian Basin – split among Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, and the far western corner of Uzbekistan – might collectively have potential oil reserves of 186 billion barrels, in addition to much smaller proven reserves, the high-end estimate for which is only 32 billion barrels. The Caspian's total output (proven and potential) is roughly a third of the Gulf's proven reserves of 674 billion barrels, with Persian Gulf fields possessing literally trillions of barrels more in unproven reserves. Looked at another way, the collective potential and proven oil reserves of the Caspian are roughly equivalent to three-quarters of the proven holdings of Saudi Arabia alone (264.2 billion barrels), with the Kingdom still banking as much as 1 trillion barrels in potential reserves. In terms of gas, the Caspian Basin weighs in at slightly more than one-quarter of the Gulf's proven reserves: the five littoral states of the Caspian, plus western Uzbekistan, have potential and proven reserves estimated at 560 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), as compared to the Gulf's proven holdings of 1,923 Tcf.[7] In short, the Caspian may be important, but it lacks the potential to alter the prominent role of the Gulf states in oil and natural gas exports.

5 George W. Bush, *Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People*, September 20, 2001, the U.S. Capitol, Washington, DC, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html.

6 See, for example, Geoffrey Kemp, "The Persian Gulf Remains the Strategic Prize," *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998-99), pp. 132-149; Martha Brill Olcott, "The Caspian's False Promise," *Foreign Policy*, no. 111 (Summer 1998), pp. 95-112; Amy Myers Jaffe and Robert Manning, "The Myth of the Caspian 'Great Game': The Real Geopolitics of Energy," *Survival*, vol. 40, no. 4, (Winter 1998-99), pp. 112-131; and Amy Myers Jaffe, *Unlocking the Assets: Energy and the Future of Central Asia and the Caucasus*, (Rice University: James A. Baker, III Institute for Public Policy, April 1998), 26 pp.

7 Figures derived from United States Energy Information Administration (EIA) statistics, www.eia.doe.gov . See especially, *Persian Gulf Energy Fact Sheet*, April 2003, www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/pgulf.html, and *Caspian Sea: Key Oil and Gas Statistics*, August 2003, www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/caspstats.html.

Moreover, despite U.S. efforts to encourage Kazakh and even Turkmen participation in Western-oriented pipelines (e.g., the Baku-Ceyhan route), most of the oil and gas from these two states will continue to flow to Russia, other former Soviet states, and, to a lesser extent, Iran, or will be consumed domestically. Both Tehran and Moscow will seek to purchase cheap Central Asian energy for internal consumption allowing them to boost output of their own oil and gas to more lucrative Western and Asian markets. Thus, the Caspian's direct impact on global energy markets may not even be as great as that of, say, Venezuela.[8] And, if estimates regarding its potential reserves prove to be overly ambitious, the Caspian's impact could be much less.

A Region unto Itself

The response to the September 11th attacks helped to promote a more clear differentiation between Central Asia and the Caucasus, but conceptually this trend is incomplete in the collective mind of the U.S. government. Both the State Department and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) still lump the two together under a single deputy assistant secretary or office director. In this regard, the military side of DoD has been out ahead, having altered its unified command boundaries well in advance of September 11th to transfer the Central Asian states (and Afghanistan) to the same area of responsibility (AOR) as the rest of the Greater Middle East under U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM).

In making this point, we do not mean to be overly critical of policy steps and organizational structures adopted in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. The 1990s was a dizzying decade in terms of the strategic shifts and realignments the world witnessed. Lumping the Caucasus and Central Asia together was understandable at a time when the U.S. government was still trying to address fully all the elements resulting from the collapse of the communist bloc and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It is easy to forget how shocking that period was for geopolitics, and, to some extent, a conjoined approach to Central Asia and the Caucasus was needed simply to get sufficient attention paid to these areas, when issues like NATO expansion into Central and Eastern Europe and ongoing civil wars in the former Yugoslavia were dominating policy agendas.

8 Ibid.

The Silk Road Strategy Act, passed by Congress in 1999, deserves particular credit for helping to focus U.S. efforts in both the Caucasus and Central Asia.[9] Our point here simply is that more than twelve years after the Soviet collapse greater specificity is needed in how we approach these two regions. To this end, both State and OSD need to update their organizational structures to reflect Central Asia's linkages to its south and east and to leverage the Caucasus' ties to Eastern Europe and (especially in the case of Georgia) the Black Sea littoral.

Dickering over the geographic divisions of "Eurasia" is not simply a picayune academic debate. The nature of the conflicts and the security challenges in Central Asia and the Caucasus are sufficiently different that they warrant delimitation as two separate regions. In large measure, the South Caucasus is a region defined by ethnicity and ethnic conflict. The Abkhaz and Ossettian separatist movements in Georgia and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh are all rooted in ethnicity, with the latter conflict also having a religious dimension as a clash between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. Likewise, the North Caucasus is heavily influenced by ethnic divisions, which lie at the basis for Chechen claims of independence and factor into tensions between Ossetians and Ingushetians as well.

In contrast, though, Central Asia possesses a dizzying mix of ethnic groups – to include Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Russians, Tartars, Tajiks, Turkmen, Uigurs, Ukrainians, and Uzbeks, each of which are present in significant numbers – but its overall level of ethnic tension has been low, at least compared to other post-communist states. There have been occasional riots and ethnic-inspired outbursts, but major bloodshed has not occurred – at least on the basis of ethnic clashes – anywhere in the five former Soviet Central Asian states since they attained independence.[10]

Migration by ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan, coupled with increased birthrates among the Kazakhs, is en route to eliminating slowly what once was seen as a principal flashpoint in Central Asian security: fears that either northern Kazakhstan would be annexed by a reinvigorated and revanchist Russia or that Kazakh suppression of ethnic Russian rights would force Russia to

9 Full text of the Silk Road Strategy Act is available at www.eurasianet.org/resource/regional/silkroad.html.

10 The 1989 clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana Valley are cited by some sources as evidence of the region's potential for ethnic conflict. However, the majority of the Meskhetian Turks – who were natives of the Caucasus forcibly resettled by Stalin in the Fergana at the end of World War II – have re-immigrated back to their native lands in Georgia, reducing, for the most part, the potential for this group to serve as a primary source of ethnic tension.

Fergana Valley

intervene for the protection of its diaspora. In truth, Russian rhetoric never reached the same fever pitch over northern Kazakhstan as it did over alleged abuses against the Russophone communities in the politically more sensitive Baltic states, especially Estonia and Latvia. This was despite the fact that Kazakhstan implemented laws limiting the use of Russian in official business that were much stricter than more controversial legislation passed in Estonia and Latvia. Ultimately, though, the decision by many ethnic Russians to depart Kazakhstan is driven as much, if not more, by limited economic prospects than by restrictions on language; that said, there is a growing linkage in Kazakhstan between knowledge of the native language and employment opportunities.[11] The absence of any widespread violence against the Slavic ethnic groups in the region, and especially in Kazakhstan, is one of the few success stories post-Soviet Central Asia can boast.

The other ethnic divide principally cited is the Uzbek-Tajik-Kyrgyz cleavage, which is geographically concentrated in the Fergana Valley. In Central Asia, as in other parts of the USSR, Soviet leaders split ethnic groups across republican borders to prevent nationalist movements from coalescing into full-blown secessionist movements. There was a deliberate effort to ensure that ethnic groups were never entirely concentrated in their eponymous republic. In the case of the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), this resulted in a bizarre gerrymandering of the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik borders to create a cross-cutting spiral among the three states' frontiers in the densely populated Fergana Valley. Significant Uzbek and Tajik populations were cut off from their eponymous republic either by assignment to Kyrgyz administration directly

11 For an excellent discussion of the status of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan and efforts by the Kazakh leadership to develop a cohesive state, see Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2002), pp. 51-86.

or through the creation of non-contiguous enclaves of Uzbek and Tajik territory inside Kyrgyz frontiers. Uzbekistan inherited two such enclaves inside Kyrgyzstan, while Tajikistan has one, in addition to a separate enclave inside Uzbek territory. A large Uzbek population around the city of Khujand (i.e., the Leninabad oblast) was also grafted onto western Tajikistan while the Uzbek SSR was assigned the cities of Bukhara and Samarqand, essential sites in the history of Tajik culture and an area in which Tajiks constitute the majority population.[12]

Further muddying the waters, the Fergana is an agriculturally rich area and the most densely populated of Central Asia. Each of the three states has important economic stakes in the valley. In addition to being home to an essential water supply, the Fergana encompasses a quarter of Uzbekistan's cotton production, half of Kyrgyzstan's total agricultural and industrial output, and three-quarters of Tajikistan's arable land.[13] This combination of ethnic diversity, haphazard frontiers, and economic importance resulted in the identification of the Fergana Valley early on in the post-Soviet era as a looming security imperative.

Still, it is wrong to view the future of Central Asia through the lens of the type of ethnic violence that has beset the Balkans or the Caucasus. Turkestan – the historical region encompassing the five modern Central Asian states – was home to an array of ethnic groups throughout history, many of whom were assimilated and folded into one another during the constant migrations characteristic of the region's traditional nomadic lifestyle. Multi-ethnicity is far from a foreign concept in this region and the overall benign treatment of Slavs resident in the region reinforces this to large degree. Of the five eponymous ethnic groups in Central Asia, four have common Turkic roots, with the Persian Tajiks being the odd man out, ethnically and linguistically. "Ethnicity" is thus a difficult concept to parse in the Central Asian context. For example, the ethnic distinction between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs is particularly dubious: they are essentially the same people with the former having become associated with the mountains while the latter took to the steppes.

This highlights an essential characteristic of determining loyalties in Central Asia: regionalism is of far greater importance in terms of assessing group affiliation than ethnicity on its own. It

12 For an extended discussion of ethnic groups and potential tensions in the Fergana, see Kenneth Weisbrode, *Central Eurasia: Prize or Quicksand?* Adelphi Paper 338, (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001), pp. 45-62.

13 Ibid., p. 47.

is instructive, in this regard, to consider that the principal "hot" conflict in the post-Soviet era – the Tajik civil war – was largely fought among contending regional factions within Tajikistan. Of the multiple factions involved in the conflict, only one – the ethnic Uzbeks from Khujand – had an ethnic distinction, but it was not a motivating factor in their involvement in the conflict. Few assign the Tajik civil war status as an ethnic conflict and it is best viewed both as a power-struggle between Islamist and secular forces and more generally as an internal struggle among disparate geographic groups, jockeying for power and spoils in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Participation by Russian forces in the conflict was not ethnically motivated (e.g., there was no widespread anti-Slav oppression), with Russian support for the ex-communist Khulyabi faction primarily rooted in a desire to ensure a continuation of existing Russian political and strategic influence in Tajikistan.[14]

Likewise, personal connections and clanism also supersede pure ethnicity as a defining feature in group identity and in the formation of alliances. This is especially the case in the two largest and most influential of the Central Asian states. Internal politics and group identity in Kazakhstan are heavily influenced by affiliation with *zhuzes*, or hordes, specifically, the Great Horde, the Middle Horde, and the Small Horde. Holdovers from Kazakhstan's nomadic past, affiliation with the *zhuzes* reinforces regional distinctions as well. Each of the hordes is proximate with a different area of Kazakhstan: the Great Horde being centered in the south, the Middle Horde in the north, and the Small Horde in the west and central regions.[15] The hordes, in turn, possess numerous sub-divisions, consisting of tribes and clans, with the Great Horde of the south having been the source of power in the Kazakh SSR and up through the country's independence. It is this *zhuz* to which President Nursultan Nazarbayev belongs. Intermarriage among clans is not uncommon and the Kazakh ruling elite is hardly exclusive in terms of membership in the Great Horde.[16] But it is important to recognize that *zhuz* and clan affiliation, along with the attendant regional linkages, are an extra and important layer in Kazakhstan's internal dynamics – one that arguably surpasses ethnicity as a delimiting factor throughout much of Central Asia.

While Uzbekistan lacks the unique *zhuz* structure, regional-based clans are important internal sorting devices and are much more relevant than ethnicity. The major clans – based

14 The Khujandis and the Khulyabis had traditionally shared power as the dominant regional groups in the Tajik SSR. After the Soviet collapse, the Khujandis sought to jettison their "partners" and dominate the other regional factions.

15 Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, p. 173.

16 Ibid., pp. 183-188.

geographically around Samarqand, Tashkent, and Fergana – dominate discussions of internal politics in Uzbekistan. President Islam Karimov, a native of Samarqand, has successfully built a large constituency among the Tashkent clan, referred to as his "Tashkent mafia," while also maintaining strong ties to his traditional base in Samarqand. His personal political history is one of straddling these two clans, usually at the expense of Fergana and other lesser clans, such as those based in the southern provinces of Surkhandarya and Qashqadarya. Karimov will extend or withhold influence and spoils to subordinates from either Tashkent or Samarqand in accordance with his tactical needs in terms of maintaining and consolidating his own personal power. Interestingly though, when Uzbeks discuss the clan structure, they never assign it an ethnic dimension (as they could, given the high concentration of Tajiks in Samarqand and the surrounding area.) Rather, Uzbeks posit the discussion in terms of the "Tashkent clan" and the "Samarqand clan," and avoid any ethnic modifiers whatsoever.[17]

The 1990 street clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the Fergana cities of Osh and Uzen underscore that ethnic violence is not impossible in this region.[18] Still, were one of the Central Asian states to collapse or suddenly shed its autocratic leadership, widespread ethnic violence would be far less likely than "score-settling" along clan and regional lines. As the United States developed its policy, and possibly military responses, in such a scenario, it would be incorrect to overly fixate on ethnicity as the primary faultline for instability. The United States, has to an extent, already made this mistake in neighboring Afghanistan, where it would have been better served concentrating on efforts by a regional grouping (i.e., the Panjsheri Valley-based Northern Alliance) to monopolize power in the post-Taliban government, as opposed to fixating on questions of ethnic balance. Ethnicity certainly cannot be overlooked in this part of the world, but we need to readjust our mindset to equate similar and possibly greater value to regionalism, clanism, and other personal connections. Greater fidelity on the specific interdynamics within Central Asia's principal clans, tribes, and personal mafias therefore will be a primary intelligence priority if the United States is to devise and implement an effective strategy for Central Asia in the years ahead.

17 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003. Recently, there are indications that Samarqand has returned to favor in Karimov's inner circle after a period of ascendancy by the Tashkent clan, as seen in the reassignment of important responsibilities to Karimov's long-time adviser, Ismoil Jorabekoev, who also is one of the principal leaders of the Samarqand clan.

18 Approximately 200 were killed in the 1990 riots in Osh and Uzen. See Wiesbrode, p. 47.

Assessment

The global war on terror (GWOT) drives increased specification in the U.S. approach at the regional and sub-regional levels. The U.S. government is, for example, slowly but increasingly breaking out Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia from the general rubric of "East Asia," in large measure due to the relevance of some Southeast Asian states to terror-related concerns. To a lesser extent, sub-Saharan Africa is also viewed in a more distinct light because of the growing concerns related to this region's potential as a sanctuary for terrorist networks and leaders, to say nothing of its potential as a recruiting ground for extremist organizations.[19]

A distinct approach towards Central Asia should be part of this trend, and the artificial linkage between Central Asia and the Caucasus needs to be jettisoned once and for all from organizational structures and planning documents. So, too, the de-emphasis of the Caspian as the primary focus of engagement with both the Caucasus and Central Asia is a trend that should continue. Indeed, to the extent that energy issues enter into debates over policy options with respect to either side of the Caspian, it should be in the context of discussions as to how energy wealth can be used to stabilize the weak states along the Caspian littoral and inhibit the declines in living standards that provide fertile recruiting grounds for radical Islam and other extremist ideologies.

Separating Central Asia from the more European Caucasus and thinking of it as its own region, with its own set of challenges, would assist in crafting a sounder, more tailored approach to this difficult but critical region. We need to understand both the advantages inherent in Central Asia and the unique shortcomings and weaknesses endemic to this part of the world. For example, while the absence of overpowering ethnic rivalries is one of Central Asia's strengths, the absence of the type of civil society seen in Eastern Europe, to include the Caucasus, is one of Central Asia's fundamental weaknesses, as will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

19 Though some parts of the U.S. government have recognized sub-Saharan Africa's growing importance to the GWOT, it is still not clearly understood in all quarters. Moreover, there remains perhaps a lack of understanding on the potential for Africa to be a new and prominent breeding ground for anti-American and Islamic extremist movements and not simply an alternate source of terrorist infrastructure. See Princeton N. Lyman and J. Stephen Morrison, "The Terrorist Threat in Africa," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2004, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 75-86.

Chapter III:

Partnership with "Stalin's Heirs"

Giving Central Asia its due as a discrete, defined region unto itself is, of course, only the first step towards formulating the basis for a long-term strategy of U.S. involvement in Asia's heartland. Clarity is also needed on the specific characteristics of the ensemble countries that make up the whole. That said, as the individual characteristics of these countries are better understood, it becomes obvious that policy in this region will come down to selecting the best from among bad options as the United States decides on long-term partnerships.

Weak States, Corrupt Regimes

Perhaps the most telling fact about the governments of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan is that the president today is the same man who was leader of the SSR Communist Party at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Unlike the Baltic states or even Ukraine, the Central Asian republics were hardly engines of change in undermining the Soviet regime. Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev was, in fact, one of the leading proponents of the so-called All Union Treaty, which was designed to retain the basic unity of the Soviet state while allowing for marginally more autonomy at the republic level. The Central Asian states did not seize independence so much as they found themselves independent by default. The absence of significant grassroots involvement in securing that independence – with the Baltic experience and the *Rukh* movement in Ukraine again the models by which the other republics must be judged – resulted in limited movement towards democratic reforms or establishment of a pluralistic government once Soviet control had been removed in Central Asia.

This is not to say that no national independence movements existed in Central Asia. In Uzbekistan, in particular, two notable movements – *Birlik* (Unity) and *Erk* (Freedom) – emerged in the late 1980s.[20] However, these and other political forces were assiduously suppressed by the communist apparatus or, in some cases, fractured along internal lines, as independence was attained. Moreover, these groups were never allowed the internal freedom that opposition movements in Central and Eastern Europe enjoyed. Nor, for that matter, did the Central Asian states benefit from active diasporas in the United States or Western Europe, as many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe did.

The limited ability of internal independence movements to affect circumstances, in turn, resulted in them being, more or less, observers to their countries attaining independence, rather than revolutionary forces. This deprived these movements of the type of legitimacy and influence seen in national independence movements in the Baltic states and in the communist states of Central Europe. In short, Central Asia never truly had the opportunity to develop its own Solidarity or *Sajudis*. In turn, the organization of effective political opposition movements to counter-balance the former communists in a multi-party system never came to pass on a lasting basis.

Kazakhstan and especially Kyrgyzstan did experience initial experiments with somewhat genuine multi-party systems in the early and mid-1990s before succumbing to complete presidential rule later in that decade, but Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan shifted almost directly into authoritarian control, while Tajikistan descended immediately into the throes of a civil war. Today, human rights abuses continue and efforts to develop democracy have been retarded by the Soviet-era legacy and the efforts of Central Asia's autocratic rulers.

Of the five, only Kyrgyzstan narrowly ranks as "partially free" in Freedom House's most recent *Annual Survey of Freedom*. Turkmenistan achieved the lowest score possible, with Uzbekistan not far behind; Kazakhstan and Tajikistan scored marginally better but still qualified firmly as "not free."[21] While placing numerical values on such intangible factors is always somewhat imprecise, the Freedom House ratings nonetheless underscore the limited political freedoms and

20 For more on these groups, see *Uzbekistan at Ten: Repression and Instability*, International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 21, August 21, 2001, pp. 4-6, available at www.intl-crisis-group.org.

21 Freedom House assigns each country a two value ranking which is in turn used to determine level of freedom. The first score ranks civil liberties on the basis of one (best) to seven (worst). The second figure uses the same criteria for political rights. The specific scores are: Kazakhstan (6,5), Kyrgyzstan (5,5), Tajikistan (6,6), Turkmenistan (7,7), and Uzbekistan (7,6). By comparison, the United States' score was (1,1). For full scores and an explanation of the ratings, see www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm.

civil liberties available to the people of Central Asia. They also accurately point out the rough "hierarchy" of the various autocracies in the region.

- *Turkmenistan.* Turkmenistan is truly the most repressive of the five. It has emerged as a bizarre quasi-theocracy devoted to President Saparmurat Niyazov's twisted cult of personality.[22] From rechristening himself, "Turkmenbashi" or "Father of all Turkmens" to renaming the months of the year after members of his family, Niyazov has pursued a steady and deliberate path to subordinate all elements of Turkmenistan to his own persona. This has included the publication of Turkmenbashi's epic, nearly mythic autobiography, a text that is now required reading for all schoolchildren and which Niyazov himself has compared in importance to the Koran. In the process, he has squelched all organized opposition, jailed and brutalized would-be challengers, and monopolized local media. Niyazov has also excelled at squandering Turkmenistan's wealth on palaces and outrageous statues devoted to his vainglory.[23]

- *Uzbekistan.* Uzbekistan runs a close second to Turkmenistan in terms of overall repression, but Karimov appears, frankly, much saner than Niyazov, and also less enamored with cult-of-personality trappings than his Turkmen counterpart.[24] This is not to say that Karimov cannot evince arrogance or that he leaves any doubt as to his ultimate authority in Uzbekistan. Tashkent doesn't lack for public images of Karimov and the media is firmly in his grip. However, Karimov usually shows a strong pragmatic streak, at least in terms of dealing with both international donor agencies and external powers. Many attribute to him a knack for "talking a good game" with high-level dignitaries, regarding human rights and political reform, even though inevitably there is no follow through on his progressive statements.[25]

---

22 For an excellent snapshot of life under Niyazov's bizarre rule, see Ilan Greenberg, "When a Kleptocratic, Megalomaniacal Dictator Goes Bad," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2003, Section 6, p. 34, Lexis-Nexis.

23 An unfortunate argument can be made over which is the more ridiculous monument in Ashgabat: the giant bull cradling a globe between its horns, topped by a golden infant Niyazov embracing the world, or the over-sized statue of the adult Niyazov that rotates during the course of the day to ensure that the sun is always shining on his face.

24 While it's difficult to quantify, Tashkent doesn't have the "feel" of the type of totalitarian society Niyazov is purported to have built in Ashgabat. That said, even to the casual visitor it is clear that Uzbekistan is run by a privileged, authoritarian elite.

25 Karimov is not infallible on this front, as his government miscalculated badly in its decision to host a major conference of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in May 2003. Envisaged as a means of attracting foreign investment and showcasing renovations to Tashkent, the forum turned into a series of open criticisms of the Uzbek regime's human rights record and dismal history of economic reform. See Esmer Islamov, "EBRD Meeting in Tashkent Turns into PR Disaster for Karimov," *Eurasianet*, May 6, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav050603.shtml.

Formal opposition – at least among secular political forces – is minimal and Islamic opposition is persecuted with a violent zeal.

- *Tajikistan.* Tajikistan is a curious case in that it has what passes for a nominally functional multi-party system, including participation by the only legal Islamist party in Central Asia, the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP). The peace settlement implemented in 2000 involved a power-sharing arrangement with the majority of key positions going to President Emomali Rahmonov and his People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), but with representation from the other contending factions, which united under the loose umbrella of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) during the war. Rahmonov has since consolidated his power and the government remains heavily infused with PDPT members (many from Khulyab), though elements of the UTO (including the IRP) are involved. This veneer of pluralism is undermined by the tenuous truce that maintains peace in the country and steady efforts by Rahmonov to ensconce his authority.[26] Moreover, Rahmonov's ruling party has occasionally employed the power ministries against its political rivals – as seen recently in the arrest of the IRP's Deputy Chairman Shamsiddin Shamsiddinov – and there are indications that Rahmonov may be rethinking his tolerance of the IRP altogether.[27]

  Working against the Tajik president, though, is the poor communications and transportation infrastructure that leaves large portions of the Tajik population literally disconnected. The severe mountainous terrain abetted the regionalism and factionalism that fed the civil war. It also limits the central authority of the government. As a result, Rahmonov is unable to wield the absolute control over his country that Karimov or Niyazov does and therefore has to both tolerate and bargain with opposition elements at the regional level.

- *Kazakhstan.* Kazakhstan presents an extremely mixed bag: on the one hand, it has the basis for the most viable political opposition of any of the former Soviet Central Asian states: a small cadre of (for lack of a better term) "baby oligarchs" who quickly amassed riches during the privatization process of the early 1990s. Under the rubric of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), these new business elites have pressed for greater political normalcy and

26 For example, in the summer of 2003, Rahmonov engineered a successful national referendum that essentially allows him to seek re-election through 2020.

27 Kambiz Arman, "Opposition in Tajikistan Lies Low after High-Profile Arrest," *Eurasianet*, November 12, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav111203.shtml.

a counter-balance to Nazarbayev's presidential rule; more to the point, they seek a functional and independent legal structure to protect their wealth over the long term.[28] Having made their money through questionable deals and practices, the oligarchs of Kazakhstan now seek to "go legitimate" in a system that will sustain and protect their rights. (Comparisons to the situation in Russia during the late 1990s leap easily to mind.)

The bad news is that the formation of the DCK has pushed Nazarbayev into more aggressive behavior vis-à-vis his domestic political opponents and dampened hopes that the Kazakh leader might truly be more progressive in the long run than his more openly dictatorial brethren in Ashgabat and Tashkent. The Kazakh president has conducted a mini-purge of DCK supporters (and perceived supporters) from his inner circle and from key posts in government and industry; the DCK's leader, Galymzhan Zhakiyanov, was arrested on all-purpose "corruption charges" in April of 2002 and remains imprisoned. As well, attacks against opposition media and independent journalists have been reinvigorated, with the apparent framing of outspoken journalist Sergei Duvanov on rape charges among the most notable of recent attacks against the press.[29]

For the moment, the DCK has scaled back its rhetoric to avoid personal attacks on Nazarbayev and to focus on the establishment of the rule of law. Despite set-backs and Nazarbayev's backlash, the DCK – or at least the sentiment it represents – remains arguably the most viable opposition force in Central Asia, among secular movements. Encouragingly, a second likeminded movement, *Ak Zhol* (Bright Path), has also recently risen in prominence. With strong ties to Kazakhstan's burgeoning middle class, it has taken pains to focus less on personal opposition to Nazarbayev (as the DCK initially did) and more on the broad goal of political liberalization and legal reform.[30]

- *Kyrgyzstan.* Once considered the most liberal of the Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan's democratic prospects have been in steady decline since 1996 and in outright crisis for the

28 For a detailed discussion of the DCK, see Aidar Kusainov, "Kazakhstan's Critical Choice," *Eurasianet*, January 13, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav011303.shtml.

29 Duvanov has written extensively on corruption among Kazakhstan's ruling elite; his arrest came shortly before Duvanov was scheduled to leave for a lecture tour of the United States. The circumstances of the case and his treatment under the Kazakh legal system have all been questioned by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OCSE) and numerous foreign observers.

30 Aldar Kusainov, "Kazakh Opposition Party Showing New Stridency," *Eurasianet*, November 13, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav111303a.shtml.

better part of the past two years. Mountainous and fractured along northern and southern regional lines, Kyrgyzstan has always seemed a likely candidate to fragment and repeat the Tajik experience of civil war. President Askar Akaev has used the country's perilous position as a pretext for authoritarian action, including the assumption of presidential rule in the mid-1990s and the effective subversion of what had been a highly functional parliament counter-balancing his power. As his own family has become tied up in the operation and sale of state industries, Akaev's personal position has become irrevocably intertwined with his political office. Short of fleeing the country, he would have great difficulty in stepping down from his post without facing jail or other reprisals. This has encouraged him to resort to strong-arm tactics such as the jailing of his two principal political rivals – Feliks Kulov and Azimbek Beknazarov – and repeated assaults on press freedoms.[31] Riots in the south of the county in March of 2002 (stemming from Beknazarov's arrest) resulted in the deaths of at least five protesters at the hands of local police and brought to the fore new concerns that Kyrgyzstan could yet succumb to widespread violence if political liberalization is not forthcoming from the Akaev regime.[32]

That Akaev and his inner circle have used his position for personal gain is hardly a novelty in Central Asia. Kazakhstan is perhaps most notorious for this, given press coverage of questionable efforts by U.S. and European oil companies to curry favor with Nazarbayev in order to obtain lucrative stakes in the Kazakh portion of the Caspian.[33] But in truth, all five of the former Soviet Central Asian states are deeply corrupt regimes, with each president running his own extensive personal patronage network (systems which, in turn, reinforce the importance of clanism and regionalism). This has resulted in a growing chasm between "have's" and "have not's"; while those closest to the Central Asian leaders have accumulated enormous wealth

31 There are three excellent reports available online that examine the decline of democracy in Kyrgyzstan and the development of various factions that now oppose Akaev's rule. See Alisher Khamidov, "Kyrgyzstan: Organized Opposition and Civil Unrest," *Eurasianet*, December 16, 2002, www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav121602.shtml, and *Kyrgyzstan at Ten: Trouble in the "Island of Democracy,"* International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 22, August 28, 2001, and *Kyrgyzstan's Political Crisis: An Exit Strategy*, International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 37, August 20, 2002, both available at www.intl-crisis-group.org.

32 The backlash against the Beknazarov arrest eventually led to the early release of the popular parliamentarian, but with the controversial stipulation that his "conviction" resulted in the forfeiture of his parliamentary seat.

33 After being taken on holiday to the Bahamas by Mobil, Nazarbayev reportedly demanded a private jet, a tennis court, and satellite equipment for his daughter's television network in order to facilitate Mobil obtaining a share in the Tengiz oilfield. Though Mobil asserts that it did not acquiesce to his demands, the requests are illustrative of the mindset among Central Asian ruling elites. Moreover, there are reports that the Kazakh regime skimmed as much as $200 million off the fee eventually paid by Mobil for a stake in Tengiz. See Seymour Hersh, "The Price of Oil: What was Mobil up to in Kazakhstan and Russia?" *The New Yorker,* July 9, 2001, www.newyorker.com/archive/content/?030414fr_archive01.

since the collapse of Soviet control, average Central Asians have seen their standard of living decline in almost every manner imaginable. From basic sanitation to quality of health care, the Central Asian states have experienced precipitous and worrisome regression over the past decade. Infectious disease has returned to the region with a vengeance: outbreaks of hepatitis, cholera, and even bubonic plague were all seen during the 1990s; as this study is being written, Dushanbe is beset by a typhoid epidemic largely attributable to atrophy of the Tajik capital's water system.[34] Perhaps most disturbing of all, literacy rates and the overall quality of education in Central Asia has declined steadily since 1991.[35]

The people of Central Asia have suffered the societal breakdown and economic adversity seen in many other post-communist countries, but with little prospect for improvement in the long run. Unlike Central or Eastern Europe where belt-tightening and declines in service could be rationalized as the temporary cost for better living standards and economic prosperity in the future, Central Asians have no such expectations and their vision of the future is one of little hope. Of the five states, only Kazakhstan can reasonably be assessed as having even the potential for widely available economic opportunity in the mid term. It alone combines a willingness to follow international advice on economic reform with the resource base (ample oil and gas deposits) to fuel long-term growth. But political and legal reform will also have to be forthcoming if Kazakhstan's wealth is to not simply be the purview of a select few.

While Kyrgyzstan has also listened to international advice and acted on it in some instances, the country remains inherently poor, without access to any of the Caspian's hydrocarbon resources. Both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have turned their backs on economic reform almost entirely, running closed, Stalinist economies in miniature. Each country does have substantial natural resources to build on, though, if there ever were a willingness to implement market reforms and genuine economic restructuring. Here, too, political reform would also be required, as well as a great deal of time: both states would essentially be starting from 1989-levels (or worse) if they were ever to truly attempt integration into the global economy.

34 John Bennet, "Poor Drinking Water Seen as Source of Typhoid Outbreak in Tajik Capital," *Eurasianet*, October 24, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/environment/articles/eav102403.shtml.

35 See Jeremy Bransten, "As World Marks Literacy Day, What of USSR's Legacy?" *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, September 4, 2003, www.rferl.org/nca/features/2003/09/04092003185404.asp.

Tajikistan – still recovering from a decade of civil war and unrest – has the dubious distinction of being the poorest of all the former Soviet republics.[36] There is limited hope that privatization of state-owned industries and a prolonged period of stability will improve its economic prospects somewhat. But overall, Tajikistan remains a hostage to its own harsh topography: the mountainous terrain inhibits the establishment of the type of mass transit networks that large-scale industry thrives on, while farming is impossible except in the Tajik portion of the Fergana and a few other pockets of arable land. Moreover, like its Kyrgyz neighbor, Tajikistan cannot look forward to any economic benefits from the Caspian's energy reserves.

The Weakness of Civil Society

The poor standards of living, ubiquitous corruption, and limited political freedoms have yet to translate into effective, broad-based opposition to the ruling regimes (at least among secular forces). This again is, in part, a consequence of the extremely limited role that national movements played in attaining independence for the Central Asian states and the subsequent failure to develop viable alternative political parties to the presidential parties that morphed out of the old Communist Party structures. It also, of course, is a result of the effective use of authoritarian measures by regional governments, especially in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. But perhaps the most important and intractable element at play in the lack of opposition is the absence of a clearly defined sense of citizenship and statehood among the majority of Central Asians.

None of the five Central Asian states has ever existed before as a distinct entity. The ethnic groupings on which the SSRs were originally based have been around for centuries and have rich histories and cultures, but they have no modern experience as discrete states with formalized governing institutions. Identity for most Central Asians is related far more strongly to specific regions, tribal linkages, and lastly, ethnicity, than it is to citizenship in independent states. Though each of the regimes has tried – to some extent – to impose a national identity on the people living within its borders, results have been decidedly mixed. No pervasive sense of nationality exists nor is there overwhelming personal investment in or loyalty to the state.

Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians living under Soviet rule still clung to their own conception of themselves as members of occupied, distinct countries, just as Poles, Czechs, Slovaks,

36 "Tajikistan," *The World Fact Book 2003*, (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2003) www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook.

Hungarians, and others in Eastern Europe could look to the past for some period when their people lived as an independent state or at least as a discrete political entity under a larger empire (e.g., Austria-Hungary). Central Asians have no similar experience from which to benefit. The region's nomadic lifestyle had little use for the type of Westphalian state-groupings commonplace in Europe for the past four-hundred years. This certainly is not to say that Central Asians are incapable of adapting to modern state structures, nor is it meant to endorse the faulty notion that Central Asians – or any other group – are somehow mysteriously incapable of governing themselves or creating functioning democracies. However, it is important to recognize that they are starting from scratch in this regard, without the benefit of any good historical precedents or models in the region.

Compounding matters, to the extent that civil society exists in Central Asia, it is not geared towards promoting the establishment of unified states. Civil society in the Baltics, Poland, and elsewhere played a vital role in keeping national identity and other concepts essential for statehood alive during the communist era. In Central Asia, civil society, for the most part, reinforces loyalty and relationships to a region or a tribe; in short, civil society promotes fragmentation. This is a powerful variable in the equation of Central Asia's future as it not only works against the establishment of viable states in the long run, but also prevents the coalescing of effective national opposition movements in the near term.

The United States has tried to encourage the development of stronger grassroots organizations within Central Asia devoted to such issues as human rights and this is an important nascent step in fostering a politically aware culture focused on national concerns.[37] However, such efforts will take time to bear fruit and in the extended interim it should come as no surprise if those opposition leaders who do emerge come from within elite circles. The obvious drawback to such figures is that it is uncertain how much of an alternative they can be expected to represent in terms of reformist policies; many Central Asian opposition leaders come off much more as personal rivals to the current dictator and less as champions of democracy. For instance, it has long been rumored that prominent Kazakh exile and former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin enjoys close links to the Russian military-industrial complex and a background that includes

37 For example, Freedom House, which has been an essential tool in helping to develop grassroots human rights and democracy organizations in Central and Eastern Europe, was in the first stages of setting up a human rights defense program in Uzbekistan during the summer of 2003, with backing in part from the U.S. government.

service in the KGB; this has prompted some observers to question whether he truly constitutes a strong democratic alternative to Nazarbayev.[38] In Kyrgyzstan, jailed opposition leader Feliks Kulov once served as Akaev's Vice President and Minister for National Security and comes from a Soviet police background. Given his past associations, there are similar doubts as to whether he would turn out to be any more of a democrat than Akaev.[39]

The business elites behind Kazakhstan's DCK also offer a decidedly mixed bag: on the one hand, they can hardly be categorized as humanitarian altruists; they are, by and large, robber barons seeking to protect their wealth through the establishment of reliable and binding legal structures. On the other, that money is a motivating factor in their case – and that political reform is in their best financial interests – is one of the reasons that we credit them with having the best prospects for success in the long run. While their motivation might not evoke comparisons to the Prague Spring, their intentions – to shift Kazakhstan towards a more functional, rule-of-law-based state – are in the broader interests of eventually attaining more popular participation in government and greater respect for human rights.

With no Central Asian "Havel's" or "Walesa's" on the horizon, political change is unlikely to come about in a smooth, positive manner. At best, as in the Kazakh case, there may be incremental change from corrupt dictatorship, to quasi-pluralism, with accepted and established legal norms and limited respect for basic human rights and press freedoms. Even then, though, cronyism and corruption will take still more time to eradicate completely. Many Central and Eastern European states still struggle with the "corruption hangover" bequeathed to them by the communist era, and those countries are literally light years ahead of the Central Asians in terms of establishing lasting democratic, market-oriented states. Oligarchy might well be an interim step in the political development of Central Asia and we should be prepared to accept that Russia under Putin might be the best model we can hope for in terms of a "democratic" Central Asian state in the near to mid term. Kazakhstan is, again, the state that we judge to have the best chance for achieving something that approaches a semi-free society, with rule of law in place and a reasonably viable economy. But that is far from a given at this point in time and much will depend on how tenaciously Nazarbayev resists change.

38 Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, pp. 115, 161.

39 Khamidov, "Kyrgyzstan: Organized Opposition and Civil Unrest."

If Russia is the best example that can be hoped for in Kazakhstan's case, Afghanistan provides the obvious (if somewhat imperfect) example of a worst-case (but plausible) scenario for the fate of the other four Central Asian states. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan both retain the potential for fragmentation and civil strife similar to that seen in their neighbor to the south; the drug trade also has the potential to overwhelm either state, but especially Tajikistan. Fragmentation scenarios can also be posited in extreme worst cases for Uzbekistan (with its many regional cleavages) and for Turkmenistan. Thus, while Kazakhstan and its Russian minority were originally seen as the primary fragmentation danger in Central Asia (outside of Tajikistan's civil war), Kazakhstan now nominally represents the most stable state of the five countries to emerge from Soviet Central Asia.

The specific case of Turkmenistan highlights another inherent danger for Central Asian stability: potential for rapid regime collapse and social disorder in the wake of a dictator's death. With the exception of Nazarbayev, who is purportedly grooming his daughter and her husband as successors, none of the other four Central Asian leaders have designated heirs, nor is there a coherent system in place for selecting one. Were one of them to die suddenly, succession is unlikely to be smooth. "Turkmenbashi" is particularly troubling as, while he is only in his early sixties, he has a number of heart and circulatory ailments.[40] Yet, none of his immediate family lives in the country with him and his obsessive paranoia has prevented anyone else from obtaining stature within state structures, such as they exist.[41] Moreover, his obsession with structuring the state around his own cult of personality has compromised what little integrity there was in state institutions inherited from the Soviet era; the only truly functioning elements of the official apparatus are those devoted to his own personal safety and internal security. Considering how tightly he holds the reigns of power, his sudden death – a real prospect – could throw Turkmenistan into uncertain territory: either leaving it open to external meddling by a neighboring power or turning the country immediately over into the hands of another, younger despot, most likely culled from the security services.

40 The closeted nature of Turkmenistan's regime often leads to exaggeration and rumors regarding the particulars of "Turkmenbashi's" health. But what is known is that Niyazov has had operations to remove blood clots, has undergone at least one bypass surgery, and continues to be under the care of German cardiologists. See Zamira Eshanova, "Rumors of Niyazov's Ill Health Symptomatic of a Closed Society," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, October 11, 2002, www.rferl.org/nca/features/2002/10/11102002154710.asp.

41 Rustem Safronov, "Opposition in Exile: Turkmenistan," *Eurasianet*, December 9, 2002, p. 8, www.eurasianet.org/departments/rights/articles/eav120902.shtml.

Hopes of the formation of an effective opposition to Niyazov have all but dwindled since the arrest of former Turkmen Foreign Minister, Boris Shikmuradov, who defected from the regime in November 2001 and took up residence in Moscow. At some point in the autumn of 2002, Shikmuradov returned to Ashgabat and was subsequently detained for his alleged involvement in an assassination attempt against Niyazov in November 2002.[42] Rumors persist that threats against Shikmuradov's family and associates were the motivating factor in bringing about his forced return to the country in the face of obvious risks to his personal safety.

Assessment

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there is an inverse relationship between degree of clarity on the nature of the Central Asian regimes and optimism regarding U.S. policy choices. If there's one constant in examining strategy towards Central Asia, it is that the United States will have to choose repeatedly from the best of bad options. None of the five regimes qualifies as an ideal partner or even a likeable one.

Two leaders – Kyrgyzstan's Akaev and Tajikistan's Rahmonov – are challenged simply to maintain control over their respective countries; neither is a stalwart of democracy. Niyazov in Turkmenistan provides a rare opportunity to employ the word "kook" in the legitimate discourse of international relations; as discussed above, he is also one bad day away from "orphaning" the country he has bizarrely fashioned in his own image. Uzbekistan's Karimov, our primary regional partner since September 11th, constitutes the most ruthless and effective of Central Asia's tyrants; his security tactics and his stubborn refusal to pursue economic reform create ample motivation for his citizens to at worst sign up with extremist groups, such as the IMU, and at best to simply resent his regime – and by extension – U.S. financial and political support for it.

Implicit in our discussion of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and *Ak Zhol* is the assessment that Kazakhstan may offer an attractive alternative to our current reliance on Uzbekistan as our primary security partner in Central Asia. As already stated, Kazakhstan seems to have the best

42 Shikmuradov's predecessor as foreign minister, Avdi Kuliev, defected early during Niyazov's reign, seeking refuge in Moscow in 1992. While in Russia, he established the Turkmenistan Foundation (www.erkin.net), which has been a prominent voice in criticizing the Niyazov regime. Whether Kuliev maintains sufficient contacts and credibility inside Turkmenistan to lead a post-Niyazov government after a decade in exile is uncertain; he attempted to return to Ashgabat in 1998 but was denied entry. For more on the Turkmen opposition, see Safronov, "Opposition in Exile: Turkmenistan," and *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship,* International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 44, January 17, 2003, available through www.icg.org.

mix of political forces and economic resources to obtain a quasi-free state, even if the form it takes – some type of oligarchy – will be far from a model democracy.

But, here, as well, nothing is perfect. First, there is the basic question of whether Kazakhstan would meet U.S. operational military requirements as well as the facilities in Uzbekistan. Second, Nazarbayev has not yet been removed and shows every indication of willing to put up a fight before surrendering his current level of comparative omnipotence. Even were he to go, he would leave behind ample compatriots, all deeply corrupt, whose personal livelihoods are tied to the exploitation of state resources. This could include some of those individuals leading the very movements pushing for political reform and the establishment of the rule of law. If Nazarbayev – or any other of Central Asia's dictators – abdicated tomorrow, there would be a significant (and dangerous) adjustment period during which economic, political, and legal norms would need to be carefully built up and reinforced, less the country in question descend either into outright chaos or succumb to a new dictator. Genuinely stable, functional, democratic states will be a long time coming in Central Asia.

And, in truth, the United States is limited in its ability to expedite the process. With the exception of the movements among Kazakhstan's business elites and burgeoning middle class, there is little in the way of functional opposition for the United States to "grab onto" and support within the region. The current U.S. emphasis is simply on cultivating grassroots civil society in states such as Uzbekistan; this belies just how far away we are from having viable, nationally oriented political movements to work with in opposition to the current regime in most Central Asian states.

Kazakhstan may or may not be an optimum location for U.S. forces, but it does represent an alternative to principal reliance on Uzbekistan and points out that the United States has options beyond those embraced for expediency in the immediate aftermath of September 11th. A strong case can be made that diversifying U.S. presence among other Central Asian states could increase U.S. flexibility (operationally and diplomatically) while affording greater leverage to encourage constructive changes by regimes such as Karimov's.

Chapter IV:

Central Asia as a Front in the "War of Ideas"

Speaking at Georgetown University in October 2003, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz gave one of the first explicit addresses related to the "war of ideas," a concept that had been circulating within Bush administration circles since its initial response to the September 11th attacks. Alternately referred to as the "battle of ideas," the concept is fairly straight forward: kinetic combat operations are not enough to defeat terrorism. We also must win the "hearts and minds" of those who would support terrorist members and groups and ultimately we must find a way to decrease the attractiveness of terrorism to future generations. We must use the attractiveness of our ideas to help "drain the ideological swamp" in which extremism breeds. While an element of this entails efforts to encourage positive changes and actions by governments, as the Deputy Secretary described it, the "battle of ideas" must also incorporate a direct approach to people the world over.

> [P]art of our outreach must go beyond governments, good ones as well as bad, to individuals, for they are the real focal point of liberal democracy and the true engines of change. Accordingly, we must become more attentive to the moderate voices in the Muslim world. For the better we are at encouraging them, the more effective we can be, as the President has said, in "leading the world toward those values that will bring lasting peace."[43]

In many ways, the "battle of ideas" concept has redefined how human rights and related issues are thought about in strategic discussions. During the Cold War, human rights concerns generally took a backseat to the idealogical struggle between East and West. The effort to win "hearts and

43 Paul Wolfowitz, *Winning the Battle of Ideas: Another Front in the War on Terror,* Georgetown Iden Lecture, Georgetown University Walsh School of Foreign Service, Washington, DC, October 30, 2003, www.defenselink.mil/speeches/2003/sp20031030-depsecdef0642.html.

minds" in the war against terrorism have recast the strategic importance of human rights and civil liberties. If it is to win over those populations on which extremism preys, the United States needs to reassess its readiness to subsume human rights and other socio-political welfare issues to advance its more immediate tactical concerns. Defense of human rights and promotion of functional, democratic governments should, in the context of the GWOT, be readily regarded as a core "realist" principal, matching in priority our evident need to combat terrorists with force. These two tenets – i.e. embracing the "war of ideas" and legitimizing the use of force to rid us of terrorists threats – should be regarded as two sides of the same coin as we devise our counter-terrorism strategies. As the administration continues its pursuit of the GWOT, this concept will be afforded increased priority, as Secretary of Defense Donal Rumsferl's leaked "Thoughts on Terror" makes plain, and already there are signs of stepped up public diplomacy efforts towards the Middle East. Yet, there has not been, to date, a significant effort to craft a targeted "war of ideas" approach to Central Asia. And, U.S. partnership with some questionable regimes in the region leaves it awkwardly positioned to do so. However, the United States neglects this aspect of strategy towards Central Asia at its own peril. This becomes even more obvious upon closer examination of the specific nature of Islamic extremist forces at work in Central Asia.

Islamic Extremism and Anti-Americanism in Central Asia

Regrettably, fundamentalist Islam is the one element of civil society in Central Asia that has thrived since the collapse of the Soviet Union. A range of movements – from the non-violent Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami (HTI) to the Taliban-allied IMU – have taken hold in Central Asia over the past ten years.[44] Today, their activities are primarily focused against the Karimov regime, with the important exception of the shadowy Eastern Islamic Turkestan Movement (ETIM), which seeks the liberation of Xinjiang from Chinese control.[45] That the preponderance of extremist forces are allied against Karimov evokes, from the U.S. perspective, memories of pre-1979 Iran;

44 By far the best reference on the modern history of militant Islam in Central Asia is Ahmed Rashid's *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia,* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2002), 281 pp. Chapters five through eight are an invaluable starting point for anyone hoping to better understand groups such as the IRP, the HTI, and the IMU.

45 Frankly, little is known about this movement other than its objective of liberating Xinjiang from Chinese control. ETIM has committed only one major act of terror in Central Asia – the bombing of a group of Chinese migrant workers in Kyrgyzstan – so its "signature" is still being assessed and clues to its ultimate scope and capabilities remain unclear. (See Tamara Makarenko, "Foreign Bases Complicate Terror Assessments in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review,* June 2003, p. 33) A central question is the extent to which ETIM has connections to Al Qaeda (as China has claimed) and other anti-Western Islamic movements based throughout Central and South Asia. ETIM's leader, Hasan Mahsum, was killed in Pakistan by Pakistani security forces in December 2003, raising the prospect that there might, in fact, have been stronger linkages between ETIM and the other extremist Islamic groups in the region, than once thought.

we are in the uncomfortably familiar situation of having our principal military ally in a Muslim region being a corrupt, secular authoritarian opposed by Islamic fundamentalist forces.

On the surface, the IMU and the HTI could not be more different. The IMU is in actuality a guerrilla movement, with strong rural roots, co-founded by two Uzbek veterans of the Tajik civil war, Tohir Yuldeshev and Djuma Namangani. It is dedicated to the explicit overthrow of Karimov and the liberation of Uzbekistan and the broader Fergana Valley. The HTI, in contrast, is a much more intellectual, religious movement imported into the region in the mid-1990s; the HTI originated in Jordan in the early 1950s and since has established a public network throughout the Middle East and in parts of Europe, including in the United Kingdom, Denmark, and the Netherlands. In less than a decade, it has achieved a robust presence on the ground in Central Asia, with its membership generally estimated near 10,000, mostly in Uzbekistan, but also in Tajikistan and southern Kyrgyzstan.[46] Unlike the IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir has taken hold primarily among urban elites and espouses to achieve its goals through strictly non-violent means; there is no overwhelming evidence that the movement has eschewed this principle as yet.

The HTI's primary objective is somewhat nebulous: establishing an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia as a prelude to the founding of a *shari'a*-based society on a regional and eventually global scale. How exactly the caliphate is to be attained without violence is never spelled out explicitly in any of the HTI literature; rather, establishment of the caliphate appears to be premised somewhat naively on an impending, spontaneous moment when righteous Islamist forces will simply be empowered to establish a true Islamic state, from which Islam's influence will spread to the rest of the region and eventually the world.[47] Implicit in the HTI's objective, of course, is that Karimov (and the other secular leaders of Central Asia) must eventually be removed. The Uzbek president hasn't failed to notice this: HTI members and supporters are the most frequent targets of his security forces. Not only are they resident in Uzbekistan (unlike the IMU which has operated from bases in both Afghanistan and Tajikistan), but they are often easy targets, particularly the lower-level members who distribute publications and other propaganda. Rounding

46 It is worth noting that the HTI seems to be expanding the basis of its traditional activities (e.g., leaflet and other propaganda distribution) in Central Asia beyond its established operating areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and southern Kyrgyzstan. The movement's influence is now being felt in northern Kyrgyzstan and even Kazakhstan, which heretofore had avoided the presence of a major Islamic movement on its territory.

47 The HTI actually has an extensive and well-designed web-site (available in seven languages no less) that details the movement's history and goals and offers an extensive on-line library of publications on specific topics. See www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org.

up HTI members and either torturing or executing them is a common occurrence, with a special prison for Islamists having been constructed at Jaslik, in Uzbekistan's western desert.[48]

Differences aside, the HTI and the IMU are uniquely bound in that the persecution of the former was one of the motivating factors for the formation of the latter. With the Karimov government stepping up its repression of all manner of Islamist groups in Uzbekistan – but especially Hizb ut-Tahrir – Namangani and Yuldeshev decided to put their collective experience during the Tajik civil war to use on behalf of their own countrymen. In 1998, they officially formed the IMU, declared jihad against the Karimov regime, and launched a series of daring and highly successful raids onto Uzbek territory (via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) in the summers of 1999 and 2000.

Illustrating the deeply incestuous nature of Islamic fundamentalist groups operating in Central Asia, the IMU emerged from its IRP lineage to receive sanctuary from the Taliban and also allegedly benefited from strategic advice and funding provided by Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda network. Yuldeshev took on the role of the IMU's political and spiritual chief, while Namangani became both the military head of the movement and its most charismatic leader.

A former sergeant in the Soviet paratroops who had fought against the mujahadeen in the waning days of the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, Namangani later became a legendary field commander for the IRP during the Tajik civil war. He settled for a time in Tajikistan after the cease fire in 1997 and subsequently set up a training facility and base in Tajikistan's Tavildara Valley. He also reportedly became heavily involved in the heroin trade at this time to raise funds and soon attained status as a cult hero for both his battlefield prowess and generosity to his fighters and their families.[49]

Namangani's death at the hands of U.S. airstrikes during Operation *Enduring Freedom* is perhaps one of the greatest unheralded successes of the war against terror.[50] Aside from his

48 Since its construction in 1997, the prison/labor camp at Jaslik has earned a place of special infamy within the human rights community and has unofficially been dubbed "the place from which no one returns" by Uzbeks. Abuses of Islamists at Jaslik were among the findings of a stinging evaluation of the Karimov regime's human rights record cited in *The U.S. State Department's 2000 Human Rights Report for Uzbekistan,* www.humanrights-usa.net/reports/uzbekistan.html. Subsequent statements by the Department of State have suggested that Uzbekistan is making progress on human rights issues, including with respect to the use of torture. Independent human rights watchdogs, however, tend to dismiss the "improvements" cited by the State Department as isolated attempts by the Karimov regime to curry good will, while suppression of human rights and practices such as torture remain systematic. See Human Rights Watch, *Uzbekistan: Progress on Paper – Analysis of the U.S. State Department's Certification of Uzbekistan*, June 3, 2003, hrw.org/backgrounder/eca/uzbek060303-bck.htm.

49 Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, pp. 144-145.

50 Namangani is believed to have been killed late in November 2001, near Kunduz, Afghanistan, where he was leading a group of foreign fighters on behalf of the Taliban.

tactical brilliance, Namangani appeared to be a once-in-a-generation leader who had attained, as Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid describes it, an almost Che Guevara-like aura in the eyes of the people of the Fergana and southern Uzbekistan.[51] Had he lived, his status and influence would have been a formidable boon to the Islamic cause in Central Asia. However, the inability of U.S. intelligence to produce Namangani's body – coupled with subsequent "retractions" by the United States about the death of "Chemical Ali" during Operation *Iraqi Freedom* – have left some Uzbek officials wary that the IMU leader may yet still be alive.[52]

Overall, most Western analysts assert that *Enduring Freedom* "broke the back" of the IMU.[53] Privately, senior Uzbek officials are less sanguine, noting that while the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan certainly depleted the IMU's infrastructure and destroyed its weapons stocks, they remain unconvinced that the movement is defeated, pointing out that a number of IMU fighters remain at large in both northern Pakistan and southern Afghanistan.[54] Moreover, while (in their eyes) Namangani's fate is uncertain, Tohir Yuldeshev is still definitely at large, having escaped from Tora Bora during Operation *Anaconda* in March 2002.[55] Uzbek officials posit that Yuldeshev is merely regrouping his fighters in the Afghan-Pakistan border region and that the IMU remains a real danger to Uzbekistan's security.

For its part, the HTI, while clearly persecuted to an unnecessary degree by Karimov, is far from benign. Hizb ut-Tahrir's proclamations of non-violence notwithstanding, its primary goal – no matter how pie-in-the-sky sounding – ultimately would result in the overthrow of the currently established state structures in Central Asia and the establishment of an Islamic fundamentalist regime. To put it mildly, this would not be in the United States' best strategic interest. As well, the movement has a robust anti-Semitic element and also strongly opposes Sufism, a much less radical, more mystical strain of Islam indigenous to Central Asia.[56] Perhaps most disturbingly, the HTI has emerged as a steady and prolific voice of anti-Americanism. The HTI web-site features publications that portray the United States as the leading force in a Western campaign

51 Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 153.

52 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003.

53 C.J. Chivers, "Uzbek Militants' Decline Provides Clues to U.S.," *The New York Times*, October 8, 2002, Section A, p. 15, Lexis-Nexis.

54 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003.

55 Sean Naylor, "The Lessons of Anaconda," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2003, Section 4, p. 13, Lexis-Nexis.

56 Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, pp. 122-123.

to undermine and destroy Islam. It ridicules the Bush administration's road map for peace in the Middle East, equates democratization with the suppression of Islam, portrays the liberation of Iraq alternately as a neo-colonial endeavor and a U.S.-led massacre, and criticizes Muslim states, such as Turkey, that cooperate with the United States militarily. *The American Campaign to Suppress Islam*, a monograph available in PDF format at the HTI website, is indicative of the type of "information" HTI regularly distributes.[57]

That the HTI web-site pays an inordinate amount of attention to the Israeli-Palestinian question and the U.S.-led operation in Iraq is indicative of one of the central paradoxes of the movement's appeal in Central Asia: the HTI is largely a vehicle focused on issues associated with global Islamic fundamentalist and extremist movements, rather than the specific concerns of Central Asia. It is odd that for a movement that has become the focal point for opposition to Karimov and other secular leaders in Central Asia, it has released precious few statements explicitly addressing conditions in Central Asia or attacking the corrupt autocrats who rule the region. (This again is in contrast to the much more grassroots Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.) Moreover, the focus of the HTI's anti-Americanism (e.g., Palestine, Iraq) seems out of step with anecdotal evidence regarding the perceptions of the average person on the street in Central Asia. For them, consternation with America seems much more linked to the U.S. willingness to support regimes – and especially Karimov – that perpetrate unnecessary and violent repression of their populations.[58]

A recent survey conducted in the region by the International Crisis Group (ICG) found slightly different results: Central Asians – and specially Kyrgyz and Tajiks who primarily receive Russian media – do hold a negative opinion of U.S. actions in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq. However, these views are not necessarily deeply held by Central Asians, certainly in comparison to their peers on the Arabian Peninsula or in the Levant. The ICG report concludes that Central Asians' perspectives of the United States and the West more broadly are still in their formative stages and therefore remain malleable. But for some, at least, the support provided by the United

57 See www.hizb-ut-tahrir.org.

58 This was the perception of one of the author's of this study in background discussions with Uzbeks during interviews in Tashkent, June 2003. As well, this opinion seems to be reinforced by frequent travelers in the region, such as the writer, Lutz Kleveman, who conveyed similar sentiments about Central Asians' perceptions of America in his assessment of the direction U.S. policy toward Central Asia should take in the aftermath of the "revolution of roses" in Georgia. See Lutz Kleveman, "What Georgia Taught Us: Washington Must Stop Aiding Central Asia's Dictators," December 3, 2003, www.slate.com.

States to the dictators in Central Asia is at best specious and at worst hypocritical, given U.S. action against the likes of Saddam Hussein.[59]

We raise these points as it would be wrong to suggest that all Central Asians – and even those who are members of the HTI – fully embrace the Islamic extremist statements and anti-American posture put forth in the HTI's official literature. Instead, it is more appropriate to see the appeal of groups like the HTI as a symptom of both the social decay in Central Asia and the absence of alternative civil-society outlets. As in the Persian Gulf states, Islam exists as a fallback outlet for dissent and opposition to the governments, when secular, political movements are not available. It is therefore possible to argue that the HTI derives its support from the fact that it is a well-organized, well-funded organization with a message in opposition to the ruling elites of Central Asia, rather than to suggest that its tenets have magnetic populist appeal. The important thing that the HTI brings to the table is an effective vehicle for dissent; its message is, to some extent, secondary. This may, in part, explain why followers remain unwilling to question the rather utopian mechanics of the movement's aim: to establish a caliphate almost magically, without recourse to violence. It also answers the question of how an organization that essentially offers few real solutions to the immediate problems of Central Asia can attract a large number of supporters.

This is not to say that there are not strong Islamic fundamentalist sentiments at work in Central Asia. The depleted economic and environmental conditions provide fertile breeding ground for extremist and fundamentalist ideologies to take hold. However, these conditions – and others, such as over-the-top state-sponsored repression of Islamists – are reversible. Central Asia is not hopelessly, intractably destined to succumb to Islamic extremism, as regional governments occasionally argue in response to outside qualms regarding their human rights records. But remedial action will be required to stem further radicalization of the population.

That said, under current circumstances, the prospects for necessary economic and political reforms are not encouraging. Nor is there much room for optimism that Central Asian states (and especially Uzbekistan) will tailor the methods employed by their security forces from the current approach, which at times borders on the anti-terrorism equivalent of "carpet bombing" in terms

59 See *Is Radical Islam Inevitable in Central Asia? Priorities for Engagement*, International Crisis Group Asia Report No. 72, December 22, 2003, especially pp. 20-24, available through www.intl-crisis-group.org.

of the scope of arrests and detentions. Repression of Islamists was one of the motivating forces in the establishment of the IMU, as discussed above, and remains a potent energizing force for those attracted to the HTI and radical Islam in general.

In the near term, the central question is whether Hizb ut-Tahrir – or more accurately those individuals and groups who currently adhere to the HTI ideology – will remain non-violent indefinitely. Splinter movements have already begun to appear that eschew the HTI's non-violent approach, at least in their rhetoric. The most notable in this regard are *Akromiylar*, based in the Fergana, and Hizb an-Nasra, which, like the IMU, seeks the explicit overthrow of the Karimov regime.[60] The exact size and capabilities of these groups remain unknown and, to date, there is no evidence that either has actually perpetrated terrorist acts or that they even have the means to do so. Still, the simple fact of their existence creates sufficient cause for concern as it indicates that previously non-violent forces may be willing to adopt more confrontational tactics in response to repression by the state. An important variable in the Central Asian security question is how these forces eventually manifest themselves: does the bulk of Hizb ut-Tahrir – with its estimated 10,000 members – become militarized or does the movement collapse under dissent over tactics? Alternatively, could those forces within the HTI fed up with persecution find an entirely new outlet, perhaps constructed on the framework of the remnants of the IMU? From the U.S. perspective, further radicalization and militarization of Islamist movements within Central Asia would only deepen the strategic conundrum it already confronts: partnership with regimes needed for base access to fight major terrorist organizations (e.g., the Taliban and Al Qaeda) is serving to hurt the U.S. image in the eyes of an entirely new Muslim constituency, potentially creating new ranks of anti-American Islamic extremists.

Assessment

Writing in the November 2001 issue of *The New Yorker*, long-time Middle East scholar Bernard Lewis attempted to explain the sources of conflict between the Western and Islamic worlds to an audience still in shock from Al Qaeda's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Among the many sources of Islamic hatred towards the West discussed by Lewis, perhaps the most cogent is the widespread perception in the Middle East of a United States that is deeply

60 Tamara Makarenko, "Hizb ut-Tahrir on the Rise in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, December 2002, p. 32.

cynical in its dealing with the Muslim world. America is seen as espousing democracy and human rights on the one hand, while on the other supporting regimes throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds that repress their own people and deny them basic participation in their governments. U.S. interests in oil (and other economic resources), as well as its requirement for military bases and access, are viewed as trumping Washington's prosaic statements on democracy and human rights, rendering America the ultimate hypocrite in the eyes of many Middle Easterners. Worse still, Lewis notes, is the resentment of many Muslims and Arabs that the United States does not expect more from them; there is a perception that Westerners do not judge Middle Easterners to be capable of striving for something better than the current societies they live under, in direct contrast to efforts by the United States to promote democracy elsewhere.[61]

This element of the dynamic between Islam and the West is an important consideration as the United States shapes its overall strategy in the "war of ideas" and there are already strong indications that the Bush administration has decided to attack the notion of a United States indifferent to the rights and needs of everyday Muslims and Arabs. The president has, for example, begun to echo the sentiment that in the aftermath of Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, the objective for the region and the international community should not simply be a free and stable Iraq, but a free and stable Middle East. He made this point explicitly in a speech, delivered in November 2003, marking the twentieth anniversary of the establishment of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). President Bush seemed to be speaking directly to the criticism cited by Lewis above:

> Are the peoples of the Middle East somehow beyond the reach of liberty? Are millions of men and women and children condemned by history or culture to live in despotism? Are they alone never to know freedom, and never even to have a choice in the matter? I, for one, do not believe it. I believe every person has the ability and the right to be free.[62]

The president went on to reject the notion of the incompatibility between Islam and democracy, before calling on Saudi Arabia and Egypt to show "true leadership" in the pursuit of democracy for the people of the Middle East. While President Bush eschewed any explicit criticism of either Cairo or Riyadh for their democratic shortcomings in his NED speech, that he was raising the

61 Bernard Lewis, "The Revolt of Islam," *The New Yorker*, November 19, 2001, archived online at www.newyorker.com/fact/content/?011119fa_FACT2.

62 George W. Bush, *Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy*, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Washington, DC, November 6, 2003, www.ned.org/events/anniversary/oct1603-Bush.html.

necessity of democracy in Egypt and Saudi Arabia in so public a forum was in itself an important indicator of a necessary course correction in U.S. policy towards the Middle East.

Freed from the strategic constraints of the Cold War era, there no longer is any abiding reason for the United States to tolerate partnerships with unrepentantly autocratic states. To the contrary, there is every reason for the United States to support movement towards greater freedom for all people, especially those in regions – such as the Middle East – where the United States has not, in the past, been as vocal as possible in calling for improved political conditions and greater civil liberties. The United States must not be reckless in pushing for democratic change in states such as Saudi Arabia, but it must be consistent and responsible in demonstrating to anyone who cares to listen that we are a force supporting reform and change and that our concern and interest is the advancement of democratic ideas and free-market economies. This should be a core principle of any strategy that the United States employs in pursuing the "war of ideas." The president's NED speech was an important clarion call in that regard.

From the perspective of U.S. grand strategy towards Central Asia, though, this new tack in policy raises serious questions. It can easily (if somewhat simplistically) be argued that we are callously repeating our errors in Central Asia at the very moment we are attempting to readjust our course in the Middle East. Although the United States has pumped significant economic and security assistance into Central Asia, average Central Asians are more likely to perceive these funds as simply pay-offs, propping up regional autocrats in exchange for military access. If the United States is serious about waging a "battle of ideas" on all fronts in the GWOT, a more concerted public diplomacy campaign is needed to win over the population of Central Asia.

As noted earlier, the impressions and attitudes of Central Asians towards the West are not yet as deeply entrenched as elsewhere; they can be reversed. But, doing so will require a course correction of U.S. policy, which has largely turned a blind eye to the abuses of the Central Asian regimes in order to secure their support for the GWOT. Our contention is that relationships in Central Asia, if not managed better, could do more harm to long-term U.S. interests than some of the immediate challenges our forces are deployed to confront. At a minimum, diversification of U.S. force posture in the region might make the United States less beholden to any one state

(e.g., Uzbekistan) and therefore more free to step up calls for democratic change or at least a shift towards more functional rule-of-law-based societies in Central Asia.

Admittedly, the United States must walk a fine line. Its presence on the ground in Central Asia and its commitment of financial resources to the countries of the region quite literally buy the United States access, but not only militarily. It is able to use those funds to help build up civil society and to pursue other laudable goals. Uzbekistan's human rights record is still dismal, but one can realistically ask if it might not be even worse were it not for the limited pressure that the United States has exerted on Tashkent over the past two years. Even among those who abhor leaders such as Karimov, there is not a consensus that a complete withdrawal by the United States from the region would necessarily result in a positive change for the peoples of the region.[63] The optimal path is for the United States to remain engaged but to become more active and more vocal in supporting initiatives to better the lives of everyday Central Asians.

63 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003.

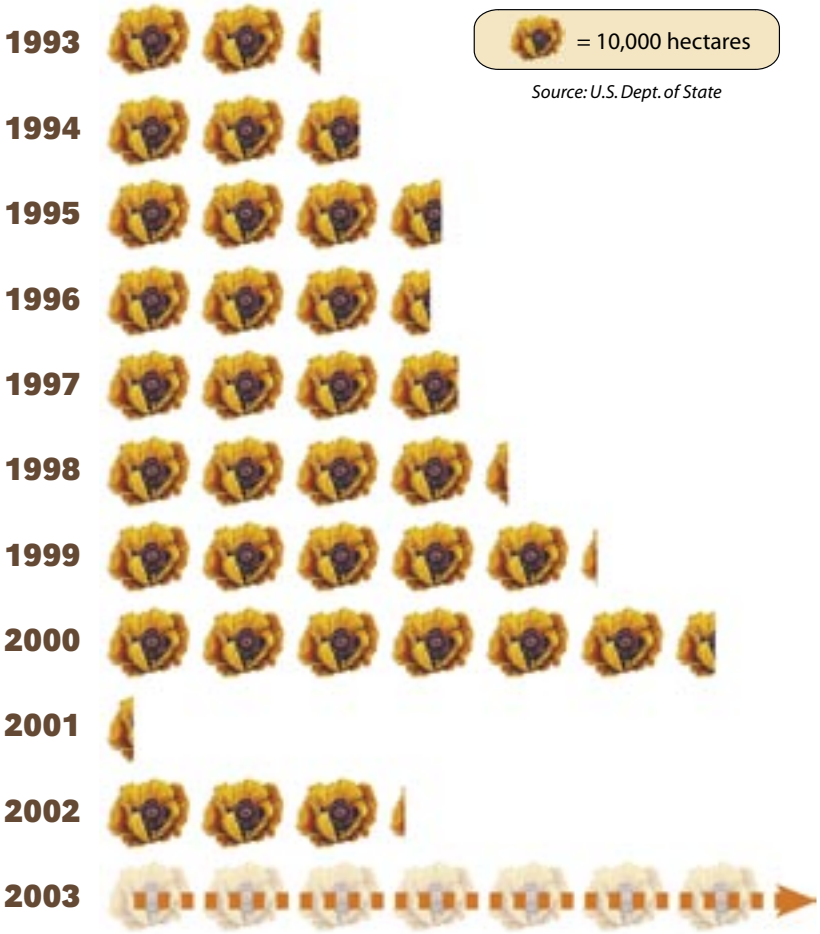
Chapter V:
The Smuggling of Illicit Materials

Before moving on to an explicit examination of U.S. military posture options in Central Asia, some discussion is needed about the relationship between extremist terrorists and the narcotics industry and the implications of drug trafficking for another core U.S. national security concern, namely, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Our response to an entrenched narcotics apparatus in South Asia and extensive smuggling networks throughout Central Asia is an important variable in the formation of a long-term U.S. strategy towards these regions. Tracking and interdiction of smuggling routes will likely take on more and more prominence in the mid term, as the United States looks beyond immediate stability operations and the pursuit of specific terrorist leadership targets. This, of necessity, must be factored into assessments of the requirements for future U.S. military presence in Central Asia and may ultimately serve as a hedge against our ability to disengage completely from military relationships with the Central Asian regimes, even as other factors (e.g., mounting anti-Americanism, endemic corruption) make such a move attractive.

Funding Terror

As most U.S. officials will concede, we do not have an accurate understanding of how much of the drug money emanating from Afghanistan and Central Asia goes into the hands of terrorists. But what is clear is that a significant amount does. Consider the following:

Opiate Cultivation in Afghanistan 1993-2002



- It was estimated that the Taliban received eighty percent of its total income from opiate-related business during the height of its control over Afghanistan.[64]

- As already noted, IMU leader Namangani leveraged his involvement in the heroin trade to fund much of the IMU. He reportedly could afford to pay recruits from $100 to $500 per month on the basis of drug income.[65] This was a comparative fortune in areas such as the Fergana given the low standard of living; it also meant that many IMU fighters were likely better paid than the various government forces arrayed against them.

In other words, two of the three primary terrorist organizations that U.S. forces engaged in Operation *Enduring Freedom* – the Taliban and the IMU – were funded principally through drug money. The third, Al Qaeda, is widely believed to have leveraged narcotics-related funding to help offset U.S. attacks on other more legitimate financial assets.

The crossroads of terrorism/insurgency and narcotics is, of course, not entirely new to U.S. security planning. Drugs and terrorists have mixed for years in Latin America, most notoriously in the case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC), which has leveraged its involvement in the drug trade, as well the ransoming of hostages, to fund its operations. U.S. experience in countries such as Bolivia, Columbia, and Peru has shown that the best model for a counter-drug strategy is a three-pronged approach focused on 1) providing alternate livelihoods,

64 *The Threat Posed from the Convergence of Organized Crime, Drug Trafficking, and Terrorism,* Testimony by Frank Cilluffo, Deputy Director, Global Organized Crime Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies before the House Judiciary Committee, Subcommittee on Crime, December 13, 2000, www.csis.org/hill/ts001213cilluffo.html.

65 Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, p. 167.

2) establishing effective law enforcement structures at the local level, and 3) interdicting the drug trade through the use of military forces. To date in Afghanistan, no one of these three elements has been effectively put in place.[66]

Islamic extremists are far from the only ones benefiting from drug money; it remains an important income source for some regional governments and the principal source of corruption for officials at all levels of government. Turkmenistan's skewed government structure is thought to rely heavily on narcotics income to remain solvent.[67] More worrisome, changes in growth patterns and the impact of combat operations in Afghanistan have altered production zones and transit routes, enhancing the prominence of the Central Asian states in the drug trade.

Initially, the majority of raw poppies were grown in Afghanistan's southwest, with the Helmand province a notorious cultivation center. The Taliban actually halted growing in much of this area in the summer of 2000 and ostensibly banned opiate cultivation throughout the country for over a year. The move was dubbed by some observers as an effort by the Taliban to follow its religious precepts and break with the drug trade as final victory over the Northern Alliance approached. Less charitable interpretations suggested that the Taliban had built up a sufficient surplus of opiates that they could temporarily forego production and perhaps drive prices up.[68]

Regardless, the net effect was to encourage additional poppy growth in new areas of cultivation – primarily the northeast Afghan province of Badakhstan. When production restarted in full following the Taliban's ouster, the scope of growing areas had increased and shipment routes diversified, to include greater emphasis on Central Asia, in part as a result of the enhanced importance of Badakhstan.[69] The most recent State Department assessment of opiate production in Afghanistan found even further diversification of poppy growing areas and the increased presence of drug labs for converting poppies into finished heroin.[70] Previously, much of the Afghan poppy crop had been shipped abroad before being manufactured into processed narcotic substances.

---

66 James Kunder, Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Near East, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), *Briefing on Afghanistan Reconstruction*, Washington, DC, December 13, 2003, www.state.gov/p/sa/rls/rm/27361.htm.

67 *Cracks in the Marble: Turkmenistan's Failing Dictatorship*, p. 18.

68 John Pomfrett, "Drug Trade Resurgent in Afghanistan; Opium and Heroin Flood into Pakistan, Complicating Efforts Against the Taliban," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2001, p. A16, Lexis-Nexis.

69 Pierre-Arnoud Chouvy, "Opiate Smuggling Routes from Afghanistan to Europe and Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2003, p. 28-31.

70 "Chapter VII: Southwest Asia," *International Narcotics Strategy Report*, U.S. Department of State, Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Activities, March 2003, p. 6.

Egress routes for opiates leaving the growing areas are multidirectional. Iran and Pakistan have long been primary transit routes and remain important despite the rise in prominence of the former Soviet states to the north. In Central Asia itself, Tajikistan is an essential conduit, and is arguably the most heavily trafficked country of the three Central Asian states that touch the Afghan border. That said, Turkmenistan also prospers from drug trafficking, as noted, and serves as an important transshipment corridor for Afghan heroin bound for the Caspian and points beyond. Ultimately, though, all five of the Central Asian states are heavily involved in the shipment of drugs from Afghanistan to Russia and Eastern Europe.[71]

The United States has, for now, eschewed an overly active role in counter-drug operations in Afghanistan. Rebuilding a stable post-Taliban Afghanistan is a marathon, not a sprint, and U.S. military forces have had more pressing tasks to occupy them, starting with the ouster of the Taliban itself. Rounding up the remnants of the Taliban and pressing home the attack on Al Qaeda and its senior leadership have been and will continue to be priority missions, not only for U.S. national security interests but also from the perspective of helping to achieve a stable, peaceful society for the Afghan people. But, as we look to timelines beyond the next year or so, a more involved role in monitoring and disrupting the drug trade in Central and South Asia may be necessary if a key source of funds for extremist networks is to be eliminated.

The Narcotics-Proliferation Nexus

There is a second essential reason for the United States to employ its military capabilities more actively in the pursuit of narcotics trafficking: many of the routes used for smuggling drugs and/or trafficking in humans, can also be applied to other tasks directly related to terrorist organizations. Weapons supplies likely travel along many of the same routes as opiates and undercutting the supply of the latter would doubtless help limit movement of the former.

Beyond this, in the broader context of the GWOT, the nightmare scenario for Western security planners remains terrorist use of a weapon of mass destruction and especially a nuclear weapon. While the danger of Soviet "loose nukes" can never be discounted, the situation is somewhat more stable than in the immediate aftermath of the break up of the Soviet Union, thanks, in part, to Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programs, enacted under the Nunn-Lugar legislation and

71 Chouvy, "Opiate Smuggling Routes from Afghanistan to Europe and Asia."

intended to help inhibit the danger posed by the former Soviet nuclear arsenal. CTR programs have also helped to mitigate the danger of WMD-related sites in Central Asia itself, most notably with respect to helping dispose of Kazakhstan's inherited nuclear arsenal and infrastructure, securing the so-called "anthrax graves" on Vozrozhdeniye Island in the Aral Sea, and decommissioning the chemical weapon facility at Nukus, Uzbekistan.

Unfortunately, these positive steps have been replaced by new concerns about deliberate transfers of biological or nuclear material to terrorists from states on Central Asia's periphery. Both Pakistan and Iran loom large as a potential source of a nuclear device for terrorists, and the smuggling routes of Central and South Asia would be a logical transshipment corridor for such a weapon. As well, the interior of Asia might become a more desirable route for the smuggling of nuclear and missile components from North Korea to its "customer base" in Pakistan and the Greater Middle East. And, despite the best efforts of CTR, illicit transfers of nuclear or radiological weapons out of Russia can never be ruled out, given the sheer volume of nuclear material and weapon components that were produced during the Cold War era.

The "Silk Road" of the twenty-first century may carry some of the most dangerous materials ever devised. Tracking those shipments will require greater surveillance and reconnaissance of existing smuggling routes; a clear nexus thus exists between interdiction of the drug trade and efforts to prevent transfers of WMD-related material. Central Asia should therefore be seen as a priority area for implementation of President Bush's new Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), unveiled in May 2003 during a speech in Krakow.[72]

The PSI seeks to "combat trafficking to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern of weapons of mass destruction, their delivery systems, and related materials."[73] A core group of international partners joined with the United States as initial participants in the PSI and collectively have worked out a set of interdiction principles for achieving the PSI's goals through disruption of maritime and air transport of WMD materials and delivery-related systems. To date, PSI efforts have yeilded at least one notable success: the seizure in October 2003 of uranium enrichment equipment bound for Libya, action which may have precipitated Libya's decision to

72 George W. Bush, *Remarks of the President of the United States to the People of Poland*, Wawel Royal Castle, Krakow, Poland, May 31, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/05/20030531-3.html.

73 Statement by the Press Secretary, *Principles of the Proliferation Security Initiative*, The White House, September 4, 2003, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030904-10.html.

renounce its clandestine nuclear program.[74] Most observers expect the PSI to have the greatest applicablilty to maritime interdiction of WMD transfers. An unintended consequence of this may be to increase the probability of WMD-related transfers over land or through the airspace of the Asian interior.

Assessment

A perception exists, in some quarters, that counter-drug missions may not be suitable activities for the application of U.S. military forces, stemming, in part, from questions over the advisability and the success of the so-called "war on drugs" in Latin America. Such institutional biases need to be jettisoned though as we look at future stability and security issues in Central and South Asia. Interdicting the drug trade could provide real benefits in terms of curtailing funding for terrorists and will yield important carryover benefits for counter-proliferation activities, such as those envisioned under the PSI. While the specifics of U.S. involvement on the ground in sustained counter-drug operations need to be thought through carefully, it is clear that the advanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) assets the United States brings to the table should be applied to this mission in some capacity. More specific benefits to the GWOT might actually be incurred by concentrating cooperative military training activities between the United States and regional militaries (such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) on counter-drug missions, to broaden the current emphasis on counter-terrorism operations. Finally, arrangements for allied and international force contributions to assist in this mission area also will need to be examined, and, where appropriate, solicited and emphasized.

74 "U.S. Seized Shipload of Nuclear Equipment in Libya in October," *The New York Times*, January 1, 2004, Section A, p.7, Lexis-Nexis.

Chapter VI:

U.S. Presence in Central Asia: Meshing Policy and Operational Requirements

As discussed in the preceding chapter, there may be issues – such as counter-drugs and counter-proliferation – that warrant an ongoing security relationship between the United States and Uzbekistan. Also, amidst Tashkent's haphazard and heavy-handed approach to Islamists, there may be legitimate counter-terrorism concerns on which we need to cooperate. Thus, further U.S. cooperation with Uzbekistan should not be rejected across the board. But the United States – particularly in light of the significant amount of money it is investing in Uzbekistan – must do a better job of holding Karimov's feet to the fire on the pursuit of genuine economic and political reform.

According to U.S. State Department figures, for fiscal year 2002, the U.S. government provided Uzbekistan with a total of nearly $300 million in assistance, including donations of about $78 million in "U.S. Defense Department excess and privately donated humanitarian commodities."[75] At the time Uzbekistan initially agreed to admit U.S. forces onto its territory in the autumn of 2001, Washington and Tashkent signed an economic cooperation agreement, which purportedly included a $100 million block grant to the Uzbek government and the promise of another $50 million in credits to be extended by the U.S. Export-Import Bank to the National Bank of Uzbekistan.[76] A conservative tally therefore suggests that in the first eleven months of the new U.S.-Uzbekistan partnership, the United States gave or lent nearly $450 million to Karimov's regime. In addition,

---

75 See *U.S. Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with Eurasia,* "Chapter II: Country Assessments – Uzbekistan," Released by the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, January 2003, available at www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/23630.htm.

76 Farida Harba, "U.S. Economic Assistance to Greatly Expand under Economic Cooperation Agreement," *Eurasianet*, December 10, 2001, www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav121001.shtml.

senior Uzbek government officials are thought to have benefitted handsomely from fuel sales to U.S. forces, at one point grounding the national Uzbek airline to maintain the supply and head off a U.S. effort to seek alternate regional fuel sources.[77]

In March 2002, Karimov led a major delegation to Washington to cement his new partnership with the United States. One of the centerpieces of the trip was the signing of a five-point "Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Agreement" by Secretary of State Colin Powell and Uzbek Foreign Minister Adulaziz Kamilov. The document pledges the United States to "regard with grave concern any external threat to the security and territorial integrity of the Republic of Uzbekistan."[78] But it also lays out fairly specific goals that Uzbekistan and the United States are collectively to work towards in terms of "building a strong and open civil society, establishing a genuine multi-party system and independence of the media, strengthening non-governmental structures, and improving the judicial system."[79] The agreement also includes specific language on the eventual establishment of both a functional democracy in Uzbekistan and the establishment of a rule-of-law state. The apparent hope on the part of administration officials was that by getting Uzbekistan's commitment to political and economic liberalization in writing, it would have a vehicle with which to pressure Tashkent to institute genuine reforms.[80]

On paper, this was a laudable goal. But in practice, Uzbekistan has offered only token gestures toward achieving the lofty aims outlined in the strategic partnership agreement. Tashkent has held some show trials of police officers charged with abuse and also offered up some prison facilities for limited international inspection. In 2003, Karimov also allowed members of *Erk* and *Birlik* to meet openly for the first time in over ten years. These actions, however, come off as little more than sops to international criticism or as efforts to provide the State Department the minimal justification possible to continue certifying aid to Uzbekistan. They constitute isolated gestures rather than the systemic effort needed to promote real change. There has been no inclination to attack the root causes of Uzbekistan's political and economic ills, nor have there been any

77 Sandra I. Erwin, "War on Terrorism Tests Logisticians' Skills," *National Defense Magazine*, July 2002, www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/article.cfm?Id=839.

78 *United States-Uzbekistan Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework*, U.S. State Department Fact Sheet, March 12, 2002, www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/8736.htm.

79 Ibid.

80 Jackson Diehl, "Our Cold War Hangover," *The Washington Post*, March 18, 2002, p. A17, Lexis-Nexis.

sustained efforts to undertake the type of wholesale reform that would be required to establish rule-of-law structures and move the country away from direct presidential rule.

The United States has an abiding interest in seeing Uzbekistan pursue actual reform and needs to step up its efforts to pressure the Karimov regime to commit to this path. Aside from "tarring" the United States by association and promoting feelings of anti-Americanism among a large Muslim constituency, Uzbekistan could be an effective and important partner in securing the long-term stability of Inner Asia. In short, a democratic, stable Uzbekistan – or at least an Uzbekistan with strong, functional rule-of-law structures – would be the type of ally in the war against terrorism that Karimov purports to be.

In reality, Uzbekistan's current assistance to the United States consists primarily of leasing its territory and airspace for large amounts of cash. Uzbekistan's other primary "good," the perception that the United States is supported politically in Central Asia by indigenous states that welcome its presence, may not be worth the harm being done to the U.S. image by close association with Karimov. Uzbekistan's support for the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan may have smoothed our entry into the region in the near term, but in the long term, cooperation with the current regime compromises our ability to win the "battle of ideas" that the administration has correctly identified as an essential element of the GWOT.

Furthermore, there is ample reason to believe that the current Uzbek government would respond positively to real pressure if the United States stepped up its demands for actual change. First, there is the core issue of money. Undoubtedly, some of the economic assistance provided by the United States is siphoned off into the pockets of senior leaders and flows through their patronage networks. As well, as seen with fuel sales to U.S. forces, the actual presence of U.S. troops on the ground creates other economic opportunities for Uzbeks with the power and connections to exploit them. Were the United States to withdraw its forces or otherwise curtail its partnership with Uzbekistan, senior Uzbek leaders – to include Karimov himself – risk losing this valuable source of personal revenue.

Second, Uzbekistan's obsession with its security situation and particularly its "Russophobia" is often underestimated in the West. There remains in Uzbek officialdom an exaggerated view

of Russian capabilities and a tendency to see Russian military power as it was at the height of the Brezhnev era, rather than in the reality of Putin's Chechen quagmire. Some Uzbek officials genuinely fear Russian retribution for Uzbekistan's cooperation with the United States.[81] This fear – misplaced as it may be given a legitimate reading of Russian capabilities – is nonetheless useful to the United States as it tries to deal with the Uzbek leadership. The same can be said with respect to Uzbekistan's more legitimate concerns over Islamic extremism and the fate of Afghanistan. Uzbekistan needs the United States in this region for its own security interests, probably more than the United States needs to be in Uzbekistan at this time. On this basis, and keeping in mind the economic tools/incentives at our disposal, the United States, we contend, is better positioned than it was in 2001 to raise the human rights and political reform issues that are central to the "war of ideas." Thus, we propose the United States privately begin upping its demands for concrete steps by Uzbekistan towards attaining those objectives outlined in the five-point strategic partnership agreement. Restructuring of the economy and development of functional political institutions to support a rule-of-law society should be at the core of our demands at this time, rather, frankly, than token steps meant to refute Uzbekistan's human rights record (e.g., release of a high profile political prisoner.) At the same time, including Uzbekistan (and other Central Asian regimes) in statements by senior U.S. officials on democracy in the Middle East and the Muslim world would be an important step towards incorporating Central Asia more effectively into a public diplomacy strategy aimed at supporting the "war of ideas."

While there are compelling reasons to believe that the Uzbek government would respond to increased pressure if the United States brought its full weight to bear on the issue, no outcome is ever assured. Independent states, particularly those led by autocrats, can respond unpredictably. Thus, the possibility exists that Karimov might call our bluff and allow U.S. forces to depart. Ultimately, the question – with Afghanistan's long-term future still in doubt – relates to the necessity of an ongoing U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan and in Central Asia more broadly. Does the utility of Uzbek facilities warrant the political costs associated with such a high profile U.S. partnership with Karimov's regime or can we afford to distance ourselves from this partnership as we press Uzbekistan for greater political and economic liberalization?

81 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003.

The Current Footprint and Alternate Infrastructure Options

Answering this question requires examining the current U.S. footprint in the region and alternate available infrastructure, as well as determining how U.S. forces are likely to be employed in the region, two years after the fall of the Taliban.

- *Uzbekistan*. For the moment, of course, Uzbekistan is the United States' main military partner in Central Asia. The United States has about a thousand troops on the ground in Uzbekistan, primarily at the old Soviet Khanabad airbase, near the Uzbek town of Kharshi, but also possibly at Tuzel, an airfield in the Tashkent suburbs. The Khanabad airbase (also referred to as Kharshi-Khanabad or "K2" as it has been informally dubbed) purportedly played an important role in Operation *Enduring Freedom* as a command center for both the air war and for coordinating special operation forces (SOF) activities. Published reports also indicate the site was used to launch search and rescue (SAR) missions for downed aircraft in northern Afghanistan.[82] Though never officially confirmed, Tuzel was rumored to support special reconnaissance assets (e.g., *Predator*).[83]

- *Kyrgyzstan*. The United States also has about 700 personnel on the ground at Manas, Kyrgyzstan. Manas' role has largely been as a logistical hub and refueling station for U.S. cargo aircraft; up until recently it also hosted a small contingent of combat aircraft from NATO countries and still is home to some Allied forces, as well as a medical unit from the Republic of Korea (ROK).[84] In general, the administration of Kyrgyz President Akaev has been less enamored with trumpeting his connections to the U.S.-led coalition than Karimov, and the U.S. and Allied deployments in Kyrgyzstan are far less popular among locals than in

82 Robert Wall, "MH-47 Crews Detail Conflict's Exploits, Woes," *Aviation Week & Space Technology*, April 15, 2002, www.aviationnow.com/content/publication/awst/20020415/aw22.htm.

83 In citing the locations and purpose of specific bases and in giving force levels we have relied exclusively on outside government, unclassified sources for this study effort. Specifically, for troop strength and disposition of specific platforms, we have used the International Institute for Strategic Studies' *Military Balance 2002-2003*, (London: Oxford University Press, October 2002), especially pp. 127-137. For base location and purpose, we have relied on information available through the web-site for GlobalSecurity.org, which features detailed, open-source background information on confirmed and likely facilities utilized by CENTCOM in Operations *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom*, as well as U.S. military operations in other theaters of the world. Information was also drawn from CENTCOM fact sheets on Operation *Enduring Freedom*, available through its web-site at www.centcom.mil. Also useful was a background essay authored by Kenley Butler, a research associate at the Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS) at the Monterey Institute of International Studies, on "Central Asian Military Basses," dated October 11, 2001 and available online through the CNS site at cns.miis.edu/research/wtc01/cabases.htm.

84 France initially deployed a force of six *Mirage 2000's* at Manas for use in close air support (CAS) missions inside Afghanistan. Subsequently, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway joined to provide six F-16s each for CAS missions, with each country contributing its air forces on a rotational basis. The Danish and Norwegian deployments ended in October 2003.

Current U.S. Bases & Alternative Infrastructure

Uzbekistan.[85] Nonetheless, the U.S. presence at Manas (a civilian airport converted to military use) has been lucrative for Kyrgyzstan, with the United States reportedly paying $7,000 per mission.

- *Tajikistan*. The United States does not formally have any troops on the ground in Tajikistan, but does have overflight rights. That said, Tajik President Rahmonov would no doubt be open to supporting a direct U.S. presence if it brought attendant economic benefits. There is no shortage of facilities in Tajikistan if the United States were willing to invest infrastructure funds in refurbishing them. Airfields dot the south of the country, including four along the Afghan border at Parkhar, Kurgan-Tyube, Khorog, and Khulyab. The latter site, once a fairly large Soviet base, was reportedly scouted by CENTCOM immediately after September 11th, but was rejected on the basis of its poor condition.[86] Tajikistan also has hosted Russian forces since the collapse of the Soviet Union; the 201st Motorized Rifle Division based at Dushanbe currently numbers 7,800 troops. About 100 French personnel are also deployed at the Dushanbe airport to provide logistical support to French troops in Afghanistan as part of ISAF.

- *Kazakhstan*. Most removed from Afghanistan of the five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan has provided the United States with overflight rights and important land access for logistical transfers, but does not host the deployment of any U.S. combat forces. Given its regional rivalry with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan has endeavored to change that situation, fearing that a close link between Tashkent and Washington would ultimately play out to its detriment and bolster Karimov's ambitions of Uzbek political (if not military) hegemony in Central Asia. Towards the end of 2001 and into 2002, Astana repeatedly solicited closer military links with the United States to compensate for the build-up of U.S. forces at Khanabad. In the

85 See "Yankees Go Home, Some Kyrgyz Say," in *RFE/RL Central Asia Report*, 28 February 2002, vol. 2, no. 8, compiled by Adam Albion, available at www.rferl.org/centralasia/2002/02/8-280202.asp. In contrast, anecdotal evidence suggests that the residents of Khanabad have been genuinely supportive of the U.S. deployment there, in part because of the boon to the local economy.

86 Vernon Loeb, "Footprints in Steppes of Central Asia; New Bases Indicate U.S. Presence Will Be Felt after Afghan War," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2002, p. A01, Lexis-Nexis.

end, the United States satiated Astana by signing an agreement designating three airfields – Chimkent, Lugovoi, and Almaty – which could be used by U.S. and coalition forces in the event of emergency landings.[87] The three fields, concentrated in the far southeast of the country, run along Kazakhstan's frontier with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and are nearly as close to Afghanistan as Tashkent and Manas.

- *Turkmenistan*. Ironically, the state with the largest and most strategically positioned facility in Central Asia – the former Soviet airbase at Mary – is also the only one which has adopted a policy of neutrality, at times bordering on isolationism. Turkmenistan has granted U.S. and coalition forces overflight rights for humanitarian missions, but has refrained from offering any form of combat support. It is the only one of the five Central Asian states that is not officially a member of the *Enduring Freedom* coalition. The base at Mary is ideally situated from a military planning perspective: barely fifty miles from the Iranian border and less than 100 miles from the Afghan border, the facility could be utilized not only in the context of Afghan contingencies, but also would make real the prospect of leveraging Central Asia as a "back door" to the Gulf. For the foreseeable future, though, any access to Turkmen facilities is out of the question given Niyazov's policies and inclination to avoid entanglement with any regional military groupings. Extensive and costly refurbishment at Mary or other Turkmen facilities would also be required, if access were ever granted. Still, in the context of future planning, preparing for a post-Niyazav regime should be given greater thought, as access to Mary would be a high pay-off investment that would impact Persian Gulf and Central/South Asian contingency planning.

Future U.S. Presence Requirements in Central Asia

On the surface, there is no immediately available facility that would offer the combination of Kharshi-Khanabad's proximity to Afghanistan (about 100 miles) and location in a stable, secure region, that is easily supplied (at least compared to the challenges inherent in moving fuel and weapons to bases in, say, Tajikistan). Mary might fit the bill, but that would require a radical change in Turkmenistan's orientation. Khulyab in Tajikistan also is another interesting option, though, again, extensive refurbishment would be required and supplying a site in the heart of the Pamir Mountains would present challenges.

87 "U.S. to use Kazakh Bases," in *RFE/RL Central Asia Report*, May 2, 2002, vol. 2, no. 17, compiled by Adam Albion, www.rferl.org/centralasia/2002/05/17-020502.asp.

That said, it is unclear that the requirement for a facility of K2's specific characteristics still exists. The United States is not pursuing a major, "hot" war in Afghanistan at this time, though it does face organized attempts to reconstitute Taliban forces. Still, it is difficult to argue that K2 is indispensable as an air operations center. As the shift of command and control from Prince Sultan Airbase (PSAB) in Saudi Arabia to Al Udeid in Qatar illustrated during Operation *Iraqi Freedom*, modern wars can be commanded from more than one location. Comparisons across theaters are always imprecise; nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that the United States could not support ongoing peace support operations in Afghanistan or even conduct a secondary war against a revitalized Taliban without the use of Kharshi-Khanabad, when it was able to conduct the invasion of Iraq without the use of Saudi and Turkish bases. Certainly, in the event of another major air war, alternate command and control facilities could be established at one of the facilities designated by Kazakhstan for use in emergency landings, or at some other site in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, or even Tajikistan.

The primary need (at this time) for K2 and its proximity to the Afghan border would seem to be its role in SAR missions in northern Afghanistan. This is clearly an important mission area, but as the U.S.-led coalition has expanded its control over the Afghan countryside, a number of bases inside Afghanistan have become available for use by U.S. forces. Bagram in the center of the country (outside Kabul) or Mazar-e Sharif, which is only miles from the Afghan border with Uzbekistan, could both be employed for SAR taskings in northern Afghanistan.

It is also worth pointing out here that Khanabad has its own limitations: the Hindu Kush mountains that dominate northern Afghanistan are a formidable barrier and forced Army SAR teams to rely solely on a limited number of extended range MH-47Es *Chinook* helicopters, specially adapted for SOF use.[88] With their extra fuel tanks, the MH-47Es were the only helicopters available that could regularly surmount the extreme altitudes needed to cross over into Afghanistan while carrying operationally relevant loads.

Perhaps the best thing that can be said about K2 is that it was the first facility tapped by CENTCOM in Central Asia and therefore has had the most significant investment in terms of living quarters and communications infrastructure. There is no reason though, if military and political factors required it, that K2's capabilities couldn't be replicated elsewhere in CENTCOM's AOR.

88 Wall, "MH-47 Crews Detail Conflict's Exploits, Woes."

The example of the shift from PSAB to Al Udeid in the Gulf is again instructive. If the question is, whether Kharshi-Khanabad is "indispensable," the answer appears to be "no." At the very least, there is nothing sufficiently irreplaceable about Uzbek facilities to prevent the United States from stepping up its pressure on the Karimov regime to institute serious economic and political reforms.

The one caveat to this would be if the Taliban or some other Islamist force proved able to mount a major offensive of sufficient scale to overwhelm and occupy Afghanistan to an extent similar to the conditions that obtained in October 2001, when *Enduring Freedom* commenced. Then access to K2 might be necessary again, if only for the entry window it provides for SOF teams to northern Afghanistan.

This caveat, though, requires its own significant set of qualifications. First, it is difficult to postulate a scenario in which the Taliban both reasserts itself and sweeps across the country with sufficient speed that U.S. and international forces wouldn't be able to respond in some fashion that would allow them to hold significant parts of the Afghan countryside, including air bases. Second, in the unlikely event that this did happen, the United States might be welcomed back in with no questions asked by a terrified Uzbek government. Third, other basing options do exist if we're willing to develop them; the Khulyab site in Tajikistan, for example, might actually afford closer access to the strategically important Panjsheri Valley, northeast of Kabul and homebase for the Northern Alliance. (Worries persist in some quarters that the prominent role played by the Northern Alliance in the interim government – it holds the posts of foreign, interior, and defense minister among others – could be destabilizing in the long run if this minority faction doesn't yield to greater power sharing.)

In short, while it is impossible to "never say never" regarding our requirement to maintain a fixed presence at Khanabad, overall the risk of the United States isolating large elements of the Uzbek population through prolonged association with a repressive regime seems greater than the worst-case scenario outlined above in which the Taliban resurges and denies us complete access to all Afghan airbases. To be clear, we do not advocate a sudden and unilateral withdrawal from Uzbekistan either because of the regime's imperfect human rights record or its refusal to persue economic reform. But we do suggest that K2 is not sufficiently valuable or unique that it should

"hold us hostage" to a regime that hurts our standing in the region and the broader Muslim world. Given the acknowledged U.S. interest in winning the "war of ideas," more strident pressure is required on the Uzbek government through private channels. This should be coupled with an increase in responsible, public U.S. criticism of the Uzbek regime, such as that recently issued by the president towards Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Our basing interests in Uzbekistan should not hold us back.

In order to hedge against even the most spectacular reverses in Afghanistan, we propose that the United States set a goal of withdrawing from K2 by the end of 2005, four years after U.S. troops first deployed to Uzbek soil. This would give us eighteen months beyond the elections scheduled for next summer to gauge the development of stability in Afghanistan and to assess the progress that has been made over the next two years in hunting senior Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders. This two-year window will also allow Uzbekistan sufficient time to demonstrate real progress on those issues it committed itself to in the March 2002 five-point strategic partnership document, ideally obviating the need for us to depart.

At the same time, there is nothing to stop us from pursuing alternate arrangements as a supplement to existing facilities in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Doing so will both increase our bargaining leverage with Tashkent and could also hedge against a sudden turnaround by a state like Kyrgyzstan, which remains susceptible to both Russian and Chinese pressure regarding U.S. presence in the region. The old Soviet base at Khulyab might be interesting in this regard, as it sits astride many of the routes used for opiate smuggling, pathways that also were primary transit points at one time for IMU forces; it also is proximate to key locations in Afghanistan, such as the Panjsheri Valley, as noted above. Additional uses for the three bases in southern Kazakhstan also should be explored, particularly as, of the five states, Kazakhstan might make the best regional partner for the United States, given its comparatively favorable prospects for political and economic reform. If, in fact, *Predator* units are based outside Tashkent, redeploying them to Chimkent or Almaty might be a first step in solidifying the U.S.-Kazakh relationship and also would be a subtle signal to the Uzbek regime that the United States is serious about diversifying its regional posture if political and economic reform is not forthcoming in Uzbekistan. Lastly, laying the foundation for more operational use of Kazakhstan's southernmost airfields

Afghanistan

also would provide a foundation for employing them in stability operations (or anti-terrorism missions) in Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, should either state suffer collapse or fragmentation. Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will remain primary candidates for "areas of ungovernability" and could serve as alternate terrorist havens if they were to be destabilized. Even under current conditions, significant parts of Tajikistan still qualify as "ungovernable" and this, too, is a reason for exploring development of at least limited basing access at Khulyab.

A Two-Tiered Theater

Undoubtedly, during the early phases of Operation *Enduring Freedom*, SOF units ferried by MH-47E's from K2 into northern Afghanistan conducted important and vital missions. But as more of the country has come under the control of U.S.-led forces and the interim Afghan government under Hamid Kharzai, the importance of northern Afghanistan as a haven for Al Qaeda and the Taliban has receded. In fact, the primary sanctuary for terrorist forces in Afghanistan was always in the native Pashtun regions of the country's southwest and in the area around Gardez, immediately due south of Kabul. As well, other havens existed in Pakistan's northern border regions. It was because the balance of Al Qaeda and Taliban forces were rooted in the south (with the Taliban capital at Kandahar) that access to Pakistani facilities always trumped the importance of counterpart sites in Central Asia. This is still very much the case as the United States continues to pursue an essential objective in the GWOT: the capture or killing of Osama bin Laden, his deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri, and Taliban chief Mullah Omar. Central Asia's importance to the hunt for these men, as well as other terrorist leaders (including the IMU's Yuldeshev), is thus peripheral compared to the central role played by U.S. forces based in Afghanistan itself or over the border in Pakistan.

A recent cover story in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* stated publicly what had privately concerned Western security analysts for some time: that large numbers of Taliban and Al Qaeda remain at large – and for the most part in the open – in the Pakistan province of Baluchistan.[89] This fact underscores the importance of South Asia – not Central Asia – to the ongoing hunt for terrorist members and their senior leaders and also points to the precarious nature of our relationship with Pakistan. Access through Pakistani airspace and use of Pakistani airfields was a decisive factor in the overthrow of the Taliban regime. To extend the energy analogy to security, during the opening months of Operation *Enduring Freedom*, Central Asia was the Caspian (important) while Pakistan was the Persian Gulf (essential). But as kinetic combat operations have dissipated and the situation in Afghanistan has settled into something between a peacekeeping operation and a low-intensity counter-insurgency operation, Pakistan's role has been both magnified and scrutinized. For even as its government serves as a U.S. ally in the GWOT, some of its citizens, regional officials, and elements of the infamous Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) continue to support the Taliban actively.

In pressing the government of President Pervez Musharraf to do more on the anti-terrorism front, the United States, of course, walks a fine line. Amid all the potential worst-case scenarios for Central and South Asian security, none comes even close to an Islamist takeover of a nuclear-armed Pakistan, with the possible exception of the devastating conflict with India that such an event might precipitate. Pakistan in the hands of a radical Islamist leadership might not only risk nuclear war at the regional level with India, but also would increase precipitously the possibility of terrorist access to a nuclear weapon or radiological material elsewhere.

The two attempts on Musharraf's life in December 2003 brought home for Americans the delicacy of the situation in Pakistan and how rapidly U.S. fortunes in South Asia could change. In pressing Musharraf for tighter controls on terrorists seeking haven in Baluchistan and other parts of Pakistani territory adjacent to the Afghan border, the United States must take care not to push the Pakistani leader to the point where his internal position is untenable. The most likely scenario for Musharraf's removal would involve a coup by fellow army officers, which would not necessarily produce an Islamist leader. But, at the very least, Musharraf's successor would be inclined to curtail cooperation with the United States given his predecessor's fate.

89 Ahmed Rashid, "Safe Haven for the Taliban," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 16, 2003, pp. 19-21.

And Musharraf's replacement by a committed secularist is not assured. The decision in 1990 to suspend Pakistani participation in the U.S. International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs eliminated an important channel for shaping attitudes and collaborating with senior members of the Pakistani officer corps.[90] Also uncertain is how the Pakistani population might respond were an assassination attempt against Musharraf successful. Could it be a catalyzing event for the extremists, who are generally better organized than their more numerous, moderate opponents?

The Pakistani Pashtun population based in the northern provinces is the most radicalized, but fortunately they are in the minority. The majority Punjabis, who constitute about two-thirds of the population, are generally more mainstream in their commitment to Islam, but are also extremely passionate about the Kashmir issue. This creates the dilemma, for the United States, that if it seeks more formal connections with India as a military partner in South Asia, it risks isolating an element of the Pakistani population that serves as a hedge against growing Islamic extremism.[91]

Despite this paradox, we believe the United States should proceed with strengthening its military relationship with India, as it has been doing over the past three years.[92] Furthermore, the United States needs to look realistically at basing options in northern India. This will risk further clouding the situation in Pakistan, but it is our judgment that Pakistan is already in a sufficient state of danger to itself that the United States must seriously consider the prospect of either an Islamist coup or Pakistan's fracturing . Were this to occur, the United States would need reliable, dependable basing access both to pursue terrorists in existing havens along the Pakistani-Afghan border and to help deal with the instability that might arise from a Pakistani collapse or regime change. The United States might also require bases and logistical support to conduct operations to secure or destroy Pakistani nuclear weapons and this certainly is a mission that India would support.

90 As this study was being completed, it appeared that the Bush administration was moving towards reinstating Pakistan's participation in the program.

91 For an excellent discussion of the tension between the Punjabi and Pashtun interests, as well as the other forces at work in Pakistan's clouded domestic situation, see Anatol Lieven, "The Pressures on Pakistan," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2002, vol. 81, no. 1, p. 106, Lexis-Nexis.

92 For an analysis of the developing security relationship between India and the United States, see Ian Storey, "Indo-U.S. Strategic Ties on the Upswing," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, March 2003, pp. 40-43.

Here, again, the point is not to suggest that we immediately abandon Pakistan. To the contrary, the United States should do all that it can to work with and support the Musharraf government. It should continue full military cooperation with Pakistan on the GWOT as long as is feasible and take measures to help buttress the state. But the Musharraf assassination attempts are a reminder of the suddenness with which the South Asian security situation can deteriorate, with major implications for the overall war against terrorism.

Partnership with India may have its own limitations. Although Prime Minister Atal Bahari Vajpayee appears firmly committed to a strong security relationship with the United States and likewise seems poised for reelection in the spring of 2004, nothing is assured. Other elements of the Indian political spectrum, such as the once dominant Congress Party, have stronger affinity for India's historic connections to the Non-Aligned Movement of the Cold War era and might be less receptive to U.S. presence on India's soil. That said, most Indian politicians seem to recognize that the close links that have developed with the United States over the last few years have helped India in its crisis relations with Pakistan – both in the Kargil crisis of 1999 and in the wake of the attacks on the Indian parliament at the end of 2001. A dual deployment of U.S. forces in both Pakistan and India might symbolize the important balancing role the United States can and has played in South Asia.

More to the point, were Pakistan to suffer a coup or revolution that ended our access to its facilities, there would be few good options available for replacing them. Central Asian facilities would have limited utility in making up for the loss of U.S. access in Pakistan, at least in the context of pursuing terrorists in the Pakistani-Afghan border region. The United States needs to consider alternatives and that dictates seriously examining options in India.

The United States' other principal option in the event of a major reversal in Pakistan is to rely exclusively on sea-basing. Within the U.S. Navy and the Marine Corps, there is growing support for broadening the concept of sea-basing to develop a more robust option for assembling logistics, firepower, and maneuver forces at sea for "forcible entry operations," i.e., to deploy from the sea without the need for fixed bases and landing zones ashore.[93] This concept, while extremely promising, does face important technological challenges (e.g., operations in heavy sea-state

93 See Vice Admiral Charles W. Moore Jr., USN, and Lieutenant General Edward Hanlon Jr., USMC, "Sea Basing: Operational Independence for a New Century," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January 2003, www.usni.org/Proceedings/Articles03/PROseabasing01.htm.

environments). Still, there is considerable support in DoD circles for embracing a more robust sea-basing concept, to build a national, joint strategic capability that has inherent potential to transform operational planning. Joint use of sea-basing, even now, provides combatant commanders with better options – most recently demonstrated when Turkey denied the U.S. Army's Fourth Infantry Division access to bases from which to enter Northern Iraq – while laying the foundation for full exploitation of a more robust sea-basing option, when it becomes technologically and financially feasible. The Defense Science Board established a task force to study more intensely this option and industry has begun to think about cost-effective approaches to implementing the idea.[94] The challenge will be to develop a Joint sea-basing vision and to get all of the Services onboard with this common vision.

Assessment

As the United States looks to its future basing needs and requirements in Central and South Asia, it is important to recognize that the primary locus of conflict in the GWOT is likely to lie to the south, along the Pakistani-Afghan border region and possibly in other areas of Pakistan as well. Military access in Central Asia could remain important for reaching those terrorists that seek to leverage zones of ungovernability in states like Tajikistan, but these havens were never as important to international terrorists (e.g., Al Qaeda) as they were to forces fighting regional regimes (e.g., the IMU and the IRP). Access will also be necessary to promote good working security relationships with the Central Asian states on interdicting the opiate trade and ensuring that smuggling routes through the Asian interior do not serve as a conduit for WMD transfers to either state or non-state actors. Finally, we will want to work with the Central Asian armed forces in order to help shape their development as professional militaries and promote their role as stabilizing forces in the region. With this in mind, an expansion of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan's participation in IMET would be welcome.

None of the above tasks, though, will necessarily require longstanding, fixed bases. Such facilities might be useful, but the United States should not be afraid to relinquish access to K2 and other sites if the cost of continued access is to isolate large segments of the Central Asian Muslim population.

94 See *Defense Science Board Task Force on Sea-Basing*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, August 2003), www.acq.osd.mil/dsb/seabasing.pdf.

As it diversifies its military relationships, the United States might also be able to scale down the visibility of its presence. Fixed bases, even small ones, serve as concrete signs of commitment to regional states and act as lightening rods for dissent among those who oppose U.S. cooperation with a given government. While there may be good reasons for exploring access to Khulyab in Tajikistan or establishing presence at one or more of the Kazakh airfields along its border with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, important benefits can also be obtained through the increased application of so-called "white" SOF units (e.g., the Green Berets), who are optimized for coordinating with regional militaries on tasks such as smuggling interdiction. These units also carry the added benefit of operating intermingled with indigenous forces and without the need for massive logistical support. At the same time, high-tech forces, with limited logistical footprints, such as *Predator* and other unmanned surveillance assets, can also provide an important U.S. contribution to regional security, while supporting U.S. national interests such as intelligence support to PSI-related activities.

Chapter VII:

Regional Perspectives on U.S. Presence in Central Asia

As a final element of its long-term strategy towards Central Asia, the United States needs to examine and understand how the decisions it may make about its military posture and regional partnerships will affect geo-political relationships in states that surround Central Asia. Although we have argued for a diversification and eventual reduction in U.S. presence in Central Asia, the United States nevertheless must remain engaged in this region of the world for the long term. Doing so will mean finding ways to cope with the tension and occasional paranoia U.S. presence provokes, especially among Russia and China. Particularly with respect to Russia, which has been tacitly supportive of some – though certainly not all – GWOT goals, we need to examine ways to ensure that U.S. presence in Central Asia does not distract from joint efforts on other priorities around the world, including in the Middle East itself, where Russia's position on Iranian proliferation activity is evolving, hopefully to the benefit of U.S. counter-proliferation goals.

Avoiding the Cold War Trap

In suggesting that there are merits to reassessing U.S. military deployments in Uzbekistan, we are, at heart, recommending a revision of the approach that has predominated in U.S. strategic thinking towards Central Asia since the mid-1990s: that Uzbekistan, with its large population, comparative ethnic cohesion, and relatively capable military forces is the natural partner for the United States in bringing stability to Central Asia and helping to stem the influence of Islamic extremist forces.[95] This viewpoint was also informed by lingering concern over Russian efforts

95 This notion is perhaps best expressed in S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996, vol. 75, no.1, pp. 80-92. The theme of primary U.S. cooperation with Uzbekistan is also touched on in Zbigniew Brzezinski's discussion of the "Eurasian Balkans" in *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997), pp. 123-150.

to dominate its "near abroad" in the wake of the Soviet collapse and the fact that Uzbekistan seemed to be the only one of the Central Asian states with the wherewithal and the inclination to stand up to Russian ambitions in this regard. Indeed, at least part of Tashkent's eagerness to cement a tight strategic relationship with the United States in the aftermath of September 11th was due, in part, to such geostrategic considerations.

We have discussed at length, in Chapter IV, why we believe that close partnership with Uzbekistan – at least given the current regime's practices and policies – might actually be hurting long-term U.S. efforts to win the "war of ideas" far more than it is helping the cause of defeating extremist Islam. We also believe that real concern over Russian efforts to dominate Central Asia are misplaced – not because there is not an intention in some quarters to do so – but rather because Russia simply lacks the economic and military capabilities for hegemony in Central Asia and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. We have discussed elsewhere the basic dilemma that Russia faces as it assesses its role in the world over the next quarter century: if it genuinely eschewed political liberalization and good relations with the West, it would suffer in terms of its economic relations and overall post-communist development.[96] Without close links to the United States, the European Union, and the West more broadly, Russia will never recoup its economy in full and will not have the financial power to underwrite an expansion of its conventional military capabilities, which have atrophied severely and continue to deplete. In short, Russia can be either hostile and weak or constructive and influential.

It appears that President Putin understands this fact and to a large degree his success internationally has been based on a strategy designed to leverage Russia's diplomatic strengths to obtain for his country influence that frankly is disproportionate with Russia's economic strength and declining military, not withstanding its strategic nuclear capabilities. While there remain serious questions as to Putin's ultimate commitment to democracy on the domestic front, particularly in light of the arrest of industrialist Mikhail Khodorkovsky, perhaps the best compliment that can be paid Putin is that he is the first of a generation of leaders in Moscow who have adopted a worldview that is decidedly "Russian" vice "Soviet." That is, he seems to perceive the world and his country's role in it through a realistic reading of Russia's actual capabilities rather than through the embittered lens of lost superpower greatness.

96 See the discussion on "Russia's Future" in Jacquelyn K. Davis and Michael J. Sweeney, *Strategic Paradigms 2025: U.S. Security Planning for a New Era*, (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 1999), pp. 52-70.

This approach has manifested itself not only in the "moral support" that Putin lent to President Bush and the American people immediately following the September 11th attacks, but also in the quiet consent Russia granted to the transfer of U.S. supplies and equipment through the Russian ports of Murmansk and Vladivostock and across Russian territory by rail, en route to Central Asian bases.[97] While Russia is overly credited with "granting permission" for U.S. deployments in Central Asia in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, its subtle support to the logistics of establishing and supplying U.S. bases in that region was an important element of Operation *Enduring Freedom*. At the very least, had Russia denied rail and port access (and conceivably overflight rights), basing in Central Asia would have been an even more difficult proposition for U.S. military logisticians than it already was.

This is not to say that all is well in Russian democracy or that the country's intentions with respect to U.S. presence in Central Asia are entirely benign. On the domestic front, the results of the December 2003 parliamentary elections are disturbing in terms of where they indicate the country may be heading. The apparent rise in appeal of Russian nationalism to mainstream voters is a trend that needs to be watched with the utmost caution, as do the issues raised by Khodorkovsky's arrest.

In Central Asia itself, Russia has taken pains to establish a new airbase at Kant in Kyrgyzstan, in part as a reminder to regional governments of the relevance of Russia to security in Central Asia. Opened in October 2003, its official purpose is to provide an air component and staging area for a rapid deployment force that will operate under the aegis of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a partnership grouping among Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan that evolved from the six states' participation in security treaties signed under the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). According to the Russian Ministry of Defense's official newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Kant will host up to 500 Russian personnel and over twenty combat aircraft. The envisioned order of battle is five Su-25 close support aircraft, five Su-27 interceptors, a mix of eight transport aircraft, four L-39 training jets, and two Mi-8 helicopters.[98]

97 Michael Moran and Robert Windrem, "New Russia-U.S. War Ties Revealed: Cooperation in Afghanistan Extends Deeper than Thought," *MSNBC.com*, October 31, 2002, www.msnbc.msn.com/Default.aspx?id=3340080&p1=0. The report is based on internal CENTCOM documents obtained by MSNBC.

98 Aleksandr Bogatyrov, "The Russian Outpost at Tyan-Shan: Kant is Acquiring the Status of a Collective Rapid Reaction Forces Airbase," *Kraznaya Zvezda*, October 23, 2003, in Russian, translated by Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), article # CEP200310230000394.

As well, Russia has tried – unsuccessfully – to alter its basing arrangements with Tajikistan, in an effort to upgrade Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division to the status of an army grouping. Russia had planned to build the 201st a new facility (to be designated the 4th Military Base), but Tajikistan used the opportunity to argue the question of funding for the Russian Federal Board Guards Force that patrols the Tajik-Afghan frontier. Consisting primarily of Russian officers and Tajik conscripts, funding for the 12,000-man force of "green hats" is split fifty-fifty between the two countries. The Rahmonov government is asking Russia to take over full funding and is using Moscow's desire to upgrade its basing status in Tajikistan as leverage to work a better deal.

Russia's difficulty with Tajikistan is indicative of the increased confidence exhibited by some Central Asian states in dealing with their former master as a result of U.S. and NATO presence in the region. It also is an important reminder that Russia's capabilities – political and military – remain constrained. In this regard, the importance of the airbase at Kant has largely been blown out of proportion by both the Russian and international press; when looked at carefully, the full Russian deployment will represent only half of the U.S. and Allied troops present at nearby Manas; the five Su-25s and five Su-27s don't even equal the combined force of twelve F-16s that Norway and Denmark based at Manas up until October 2003. That Russia has managed to deploy two less combat aircraft to its self-declared "backyard" than Denmark and Norway

underscores the necessity of avoiding an overreaction to Russian efforts to enhance its Central Asian presence.

That said, Russia will retain important influence in the region because of its near-monopoly on pipeline routes out of Central Asia and because of its importance as a migrant labor market for many Central Asians. But it will not have the means to dominate the region as it did during the Soviet era and we should not act as if it does. Doing so only feeds forces in Moscow that still seek competition with the United States for its own sake. And, from the U.S. perspective, reacting to Russian moves in Central Asia as if we were still under Cold War conditions reinforces dubious approaches to the region, including a perceived need to "dance with the devil," as we may be doing with the Karimov regime.

The Bush administration had a fairly muted response to the opening of the Russian base at Kant; it likewise should ignore those who would argue that we must remain tightly linked to Uzbekistan for the sake of hedging against a Russian resurgence in Central Asia. Similarly, we must take care not to allow any of the other Central Asian states to attempt to capitalize on the vestiges of the Cold War rivalry; Rahmonov has been rumored to be playing "the American card" in his negotiations with Moscow over basing and funding of the border guards. We must be wary of such tactics if we do move to diversify our regional posture and opt to pursue presence in Khulyab or another Tajik facility.

The Ascendant Power in Central Asia?

A few weeks after the opening of the Kant airbase, a much less sensational, but far more significant leasing arrangement was announced in Central Asia: Kazakhstan agreed to rent China 7,000 hectares (a little over 17,000 acres) of farmland to be cultivated by migrant Chinese workers from Xinjiang.[99] The move is indicative of both the future of Chinese involvement in Central Asia and the trend that will drive it: China's need for more land, new markets, and new sources of natural resources.

Throughout the 1990s, speculation was rampant that China's growing population and mounting energy consumption would eventually turn Beijing's gaze northward to Siberia. With barely

99 Chua Chin Hon, "China Running Out of Farmland; Problem Crops Up as Farms Have Given Way to Golf Courses, Property Projects, and Industrial Zones," *The Strait Times* (Singapore), January 10, 2004, Lexis-Nexis.

eight million Russians populating Siberia and the Far East, there was ample fear on the Russian side of "waves" of Chinese flooding the eastern part of their country. But while Russian fears over mass Chinese immigration into Siberia remain, in reality Chinese movement northward has been fairly limited, with no measurable signs that it will increase in the foreseeable future.[100] The inhospitable climate of Siberia and the Far East are powerful deterrents to migration (to say nothing of a voracious anti-immigration domestic lobby in Russia). As well, despite its rich resource base, the attractiveness of eastern Russia as an economic zone is limited compared to Central Asia which boasts not only a much more favorable climate, but a superior market pool (over sixty million vice less than ten million in Siberia and the Far East), and governments which are eager for Chinese investment. Also, Central Asia can meet a basic Chinese need – more arable land – in a way that Siberia simply cannot.

An expansion of Chinese interest and influence westward into the Asian interior (as opposed to northward into Siberia) is also much more in keeping with Chinese history. The territory currently occupied by Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan frequently fell under Chinese purview throughout the centuries, as did the Fergana Valley. At times of peak expansion, Chinese dominion even extended over large portions of the modern states of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Chinese "entry" into Central Asia is thus hardly a surprise and can be expected to be an ongoing process, assuming Chinese economic and political power continues to grow in the twenty-first century.[101]

Energy issues will also play an understandable role in Chinese interest in Central Asia. As recently as December 2003, the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) was busy acquiring a $150-200 million stake in a new field in western Kazakhstan, in partnership with Russia's Gazprom.[102] But, here, too, there is a danger of over exaggerating the "energy promise" of Central Asia. Though Beijing proposed a series of gas and oil pipelines in partnership with Kazakhstan during the mid-1990s, none of these projects ever moved beyond the point of a feasibility study. In June 2003, Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Kazakhstan on his first

100 See the discussion in Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy, *The Siberian Curse: How Soviet Planners Left Russia Out in the Cold*, (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2003), pp. 180-181.

101 Although continued Chinese ascendancy seems to be the most likely eventuality, there are a number of factors which could impair Chinese progress and perhaps even undercut the country's status as a great power. For options regarding the future evolution of China over the next quarter century, see Davis and Sweeney, *Strategic Paradigms 2025: U.S. Security Planning for a New Era*, pp. 71-95.

102 Peter Wonacott, "China Lines up Oil Deals Far Afield," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2003, Section A, p. 13, Lexis-Nexis.

official trip abroad and efforts to revitalize the pipeline projects were on his agenda for talks with President Nazarbayev.[103]

But the basic question remains: can China obtain sufficient resources from Kazakhstan alone to make these projects – some of the pipelines would need to stretch over 3,000 kilometers – economically viable. The pipelines might need to draw in Turkmen or even Azeri gas and oil to be worth the investment and it is not clear that either state is willing to sell to China, when customers are more readily available through existing infrastructure, in Turkmenistan's case (e.g., Iran and Russia), or through newly developed Western outlets (e.g., the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline) in Azerbaijan's case. From a strategic perspective, China obviously would like to develop Central Asia as a secure, overland energy conduit, but it remains to be seen whether the challenging economics and logistics of that proposition can be made to work. In the end, more pedestrian economic needs (e.g., farm land, new export markets for Chinese goods) might drive Chinese involvement in Central Asia over the long term.

The other dominant issue that has – and will continue – to guide Chinese relations with Central Asian states is Uighur separatism and instability in Xinjiang. China sees the Xinjiang issue as part and parcel of its broader approach to the integrity of the Chinese state. Less high profile than Taiwan or Tibet, Xinjiang is nonetheless equally important in the minds of Chinese elites, more so because, unlike Taiwan, Beijing can take direct action to ensure Xinjiang remains in the fold. China has made suppression of Uighur separatist movements a focal point of its security-related engagement with Xinjiang's immediate neighbors (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) and recently took the unprecedented step of inviting Kyrgyz forces into Xinjiang for joint anti-terrorism exercises.

These maneuvers came in the context of broader efforts to develop the security dimension of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO was officially established as a regional intergovernmental organization in June 2001, evolving out of the so-called "Shanghai Five" grouping that was set up in 1996 among China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to address border issues and promote confidence building along the five nations' common frontiers. Its transformation into a regional organization was prompted by a desire both to enhance regional economic cooperation and to encourage greater security coordination, particularly in light of the

103 Antoine Blua, "Kazakhstan: Hu's Visit Highlights China's Growing Interest in Central Asia," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, June 4, 2003, www.rferl.org/nca/features/2003/06/04062003161258.asp.

IMU forays of 1999 and 2000. At the SCO's founding summit, Uzbekistan was welcomed as a sixth member.[104]

The joint Sino-Kyrgyz exercise in Xinjiang was the second part of *Cooperation 2003*, the SCO's inaugural anti-terrorism exercise. The first part, held in Eastern Kazakhstan, entailed a command post exercise featuring staff officers from China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia and joint maneuvers by Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Russian forces responding to an anti-terrorism scenario. (Tajikistan participated as an observer.) Chinese involvement in the exercise – and overall Chinese leadership in steering the SCO towards a regional anti-terrorism role – signal the extent to which Beijing is taking the threat of extremist forces operating in Central Asia seriously. The scenario for the Xinjiang portion of *Cooperation 2003* spoke volumes: a joint Chinese-Kyrgyz response to terrorist units crossing onto Chinese territory to attack government targets.[105]

As the opening of the Russian base at Kant, *Cooperation 2003* also was no doubt an effort by the Chinese to remind regional states – and especially its immediate neighbors – that it remains relevant to regional security discussions, even as the United States is the primary military power in Central Asia for the moment. Beijing is already apprehensive about the U.S. presence in Central Asia, viewing it as part of a broader effort to encircle and contain China; moving to a "boots on the ground" presence in Kazakhstan – one of the two principal hubs for Uighur dissidents and also the Central Asian country where China's primary energy interests lay – will do little to ease Chinese fears regarding U.S. motivations. As part of its broader engagement with China, the Unites States should endeavor to draw the Chinese into regional counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation planning, while seeking to influence Chinese thinking about the future stability requirements for the broader Central Asian region.

The U.S. decision to include the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement on its list of terrorist organizations was an important step in reassuring Beijing that U.S. interests in the region are not incompatible with those of China. One way to alleviate Chinese anxiety further, we believe, is to consider U.S. collaboration with the SCO in specific areas, such as border security and counter-narcotics. Beyond that, however, the United States must exercise caution and walk a fine line as

104 The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs hosts a web-site for the SCO, covering the organization's history, institutional structure, and principles: www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/topics/sco/t57970.htm.

105 For a more extended description of the SCO exercise and a good analysis of its implications, see Roger N. McDermott and William D. O'Malley, "Countering Terrorism in Central Asia," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 2003, pp. 16-19.

China has emphasized defeating "separatism" as one of the SCO's security goals. This construct could raise thorny questions for the United States with respect to Taiwan and limits how far-leaning we can be in cooperating with the SCO. Still, if the United States is to remain involved on the ground in Central Asia for the indefinite future, it would also be counterproductive to simply ignore the SCO, as the organization is perhaps the only regional mechanism that stands a chance of effectively promoting some level cooperation among Russia, China, and four of the five Central Asian states. The SCO is set to open a regional anti-terror center in Tashkent in 2004, and this could be one mechanism through which the United States might pursue pragmatic cooperation with the organization.

Solidifying Partnership with India

One step that will not alleviate Chinese anxiety is the tightening of security ties between the United States and India, to include possible deployment by U.S. forces at bases in northern India. That such an option is even being discussed is testament to the important steps both democracies have taken in recent years to put past differences aside and focus on common challenges. Early on, the Bush administration noted India's growing strategic importance to long-term U.S. interests and – despite occasional difficulties in balancing its ties to Pakistan – has opened a new relationship with India that promises to benefit both countries and the South Asian region more generally. The new and positive U.S. relationship with India has positioned the United States well with respect to GWOT concerns, while also enabling us to play an important balancing role between India and Pakistan with respect to Kashmir.[106]

Outside of the burgeoning partnership with the United States, India also has its own agenda and interests in Central Asia. As with China, energy is an important consideration for India and New Delhi has long been interested in developing a north-south energy corridor that would bring gas from Turkmen and Kazakh fields to South Asia. Obviously, issues related to stability in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) will need to be resolved before major pipeline projects can be undertaken. India, too, sees a terrorist threat from the "ungovernable zones" of Central Asia and has increasingly sought to expand its political and military presence in the former Soviet states. November 2003 saw a flurry of diplomatic activity in this regard as Foreign Minister Jaswant

106 For a good discussion of Indo-U.S. relations and their improvement from their nadir following the Indian nuclear test in 1998, see Dennis Kux, "India's Fine Balance," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2002, vol. 81, no. 3, p. 93, Lexis-Nexis.

Singh hosted a major conference between India and the Central Asian states in Tashkent, while Prime Minister Vajpayee met directly with Tajik President Rahmonov in Dushanbe.[107] Vajpayee unveiled a $40 million aid package that will, among other things, build a modern road link between the two countries and also will provide for the refurbishment of an airfield at Ayni, in the Leninabad oblast. This latter step has fed rumors of India instituting its own military presence in Central Asia, though New Delhi has firmly denied this.[108]

India perceives the region to its north as an extension of its struggle with Pakistan. It can be argued that the Taliban's ouster is one of many elements that has strengthened India's strategic position sufficiently that Prime Minister Vajpayee felt comfortable reaching out to Pakistan's Musharraf to discuss differences over Kashmir directly, in a landmark speech at the Kashmiri city, Srinagar, in April 2003. Vajpayee's initiative led to other positive steps in the Indian-Pakistan relationship throughout the course of 2003, including the restoration of direct bus service between Lahore and Delhi, and culminated in a side meeting between Musharraf and Vajpayee at a summit of South Asian leaders in Islamabad on January 5, 2004. This "mini-summit" was remarkable, given the situation between the two countries only two years earlier, when open war seemed inevitable following suicide bombing attacks on the Indian parliament by Pakistani-based militants. But the Musharraf-Vajpayee meeting is likely only one of the first steps in what promises to be a long process in achieving a meaningful resolution to the Kashmiri question.

Factor Limiting NATO's Regional Utility

While the relevance of the SCO appears to be on the rise, the role of NATO in Central Asia is somewhat undefined. There certainly is, in Alliance circles, a desire to expand NATO's connections and programs in this region and that, in part, drove the July 2003 tour of Central Asia by outgoing Secretary General Lord Robertson. Moreover, all five of the Central Asian states are members of the Alliance's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program (Tajikistan being the last to join in 2002) and NATO has held PfP-related exercises in Central Asia since 1997. The decision, in April 2003, by NATO to take over leadership of the ISAF in Kabul further increased the Alliance's prominence in the regional security equation.

---

107 Ibragim Alibekov, "India Set to Expand Presence in Central Asia," *Eurasianet*, December 3, 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav120303.shtml .

108 Bharat Bhushan, "Tajik Silk Route to Bypass Pakistan," *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), November 15, 2003, www.telegraphindia.com/1031115/asp/nation/story_2574703.asp#.

For the moment, while NATO is interested in Central Asia, there is minimal interest in NATO by the region. Ironically, this is due to the perception in some regional capitals that NATO ranks as "second best" to a direct relationship with the United States. For example, Uzbekistan's interest in cooperation with and through NATO had largely been driven by a desire to enhance connections with the United States. But now that it has achieved a formal strategic relationship with the United States directly, there is much less inclination in Tashkent to place the focus of its military and diplomatic relations on NATO. To some extent, doing so is seen as detrimental to the centrality of the U.S. security tie and suggestions of greater cooperation with NATO are interpreted by Uzbek officials as an unwanted substitute for an even stronger bilateral relationship with the United States.[109]

In part because of the centrality of "Russia management" issues to its foreign policy, Kazakhstan has been more understanding of NATO's utility, but the Kazakh-Uzbek regional rivalry has largely precluded their independent cooperation on military matters outside of the occasional PfP exercise. This highlights a second mitigating factor in NATO's ability to engage the region: the limited ability and willingness of the Central Asian states to cooperate amongst themselves on regional military issues. Uzbekistan initiated some joint planning discussions with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, particularly after the 1999 and 2000 incursions by the IMU, but this, more often than not, took the form of Tashkent berating and bullying its smaller neighbors into taking more proactive steps to inhibit radical Islamists from using Tajik or Kyrgyz territory as a launching point for attacks onto Uzbek soil. To describe this activity as "combined" or "multilateral" is a stretch. Elsewhere, "Turkmenbashi" has largely been indifferent to actual participation in PfP activities, though Turkmenistan is nominally a member of the program.

NATO is therefore constrained in the opportunities it has to foster the type of regional cooperation among Central Asian partner states seen, for example, in the Visegrad or Baltic states, during their pursuit of membership in the Alliance. In Central Asia, NATO is without its primary "carrot": the prospect of membership in the Alliance. None of the Central Asians states comes close to meeting the political, economic, or military requirements for membership in NATO, assuming the Alliance would be even willing to consider their candidacy. Without this incentive, which NATO used to help shape and reform militaries in the former communist states of Central

109 IFPA background interviews, Tashkent, June 2003.

and Eastern Europe, the Alliance has little leverage in Central Asia and what leverage it does have, frankly, gets easily trumped by direct U.S. economic assistance and military presence. This is not, by any means, to say that NATO is irrelevant to regional security, but there does need to be caution and reasonable expectations about what NATO can accomplish compared to the contributions it has made in other post-communist states.

The policy element that needs to be explored, of course, is if NATO can be used to alleviate Russian anxiety over a longstanding Western presence in Central Asia. Even if the Central Asian states themselves are restricted in their ability or desire to work with and through NATO, the Alliance could be an important vehicle for engaging Russia on its involvement in Central Asia and coordinating military activities between Russian and Western forces. Through the NATO-Russia Council established in 2000, Russia is all but a de facto ally and can meet with the Alliance "at 20" to discuss issues of common concern. The United States would need to be cautious in how far-leaning it might want to be in this regard, but clearly NATO's utility in engaging Russia more actively in Central Asia is worth examining. In particular, it might be useful to consider NATO as a mechanism for arranging combined exercises between Alliance forces (including U.S. elements) and Russian forces deployed under CSTO auspices at Kant or in Dushanbe.

Assessment

The ability of organizations like NATO and the SCO to help multilateralize security arrangements in Central Asia should not be underestimated. As part of a broader approach to the "battle of ideas" in Central Asia, the United States needs to foster an impression of itself not as an imperial power, but rather as a benevolent force for constructiv echange. This is, in part, why the United States needs to do a better job of positioning itself as supporting those states with reasonable prospects for positive economic and political change and avoiding overly tight linkages with those leaders who steadfastly oppose reform. That said, another aspect of the "battle of ideas" needs to be a willingness to share responsibility for Central Asia with those states that have natural and long-standing interests in the region. The United States should not allow itself to be painted as the sole guarantor of stability and security in Central Asia. Doing so not only will be an excessive drain on our capabilities over the long term, but it will also encourage the

identification of the United States as the primary custodian of Central Asia, a status which can engender resentment and identification of the United States by discontented groups as the "responsible party" for any and all regional ills.

We should not, obviously, sacrifice our ability to pursue our core security interests in Central and South Asia (e.g., targeting senior terrorist leaders). But, so long as Chinese and Russian activities in Central Asia support the goal of enhancing the region's development and working against the trends that breed extremist activities, the United States should not be reluctant to work with either to foster common objectives. In this part of the world, the enemy or adversary is not any state per se, but rather the trends and conditions that cultivate and shelter individuals and movements who perpetrate attacks such as those that victimized America on September 11th.

Thus far, the United States has done a reasonably good job of avoiding the temptation to "play the game" as seen in its relaxed reactions to the opening of the Russian base at Kant and to the rise of the SCO as a regional security organization. But more definite steps might be warranted, especially with respect to counter-terrorism, counter-drug, and counter-proliferation planning. Joint NATO-CSTO and/or U.S.-SCO exercises would be a step in this direction. By engaging the SCO more directly, we would also be establishing a mechanism for talking constructively with China about its long-term role in Central Asia. This, in turn, could lead to more positive interactions with China in other areas.

Chapter VIII:

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

It is easy to look at U.S. deployments in Central and South Asia and superficially suggest that one set of partnerships can readily be jettisoned for another. To be clear, the conclusion here is not simply that Kazakhstan would be better than Uzbekistan or India better than Pakistan or even Tajikistan better than Kyrgyzstan. Rather the thrust of the argument is that diversity is needed in basing options in these regions from the perspective of both operational and diplomatic flexibility. We have primarily argued the need for diversification on political and strategic grounds (as they relate to the GWOT and the "war of ideas"), but a broadening of access opportunities is also in keeping with the overall goals of U.S. military transformation.

Central Asia and U.S. Global Basing Realignment

The United States is in the midst of an ongoing process to rethink and recalibrate its global basing posture to adjust to the new strategic realities of the twenty-first century. In general, the approach being adopted is to move away from excessive reliance on large, fixed facilities, such as those that have dominated our basing paradigm for the past fifty years. Large concentrations of forces, with extensive built-up infrastructure, will give way to more austere facilities.[110]

The primary impetus behind this shift is the uncertainty of post-Cold War threats. The ubiquity of terrorist networks and the inherent mobility of non-state actors make it difficult to predict reliably specific zones where the next conflict involving U.S. forces may be. Instead, the goal of

110 See the comments by Mr. Andrew Hoehn, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, at the 34th IFPA-Fletcher Conference, *Security Planning and Military Transformation after Iraqi Freedom*, "Panel I: National Security Strategy and Policy," U.S. Chamber of Commerce Building, Washington, DC, December 2, 2003. Transcripts available through the web-site of the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis at www.ifpa.org.

the reposturing effort is to move forces into the general vicinity of those areas – e.g., the "arc of instability" – where they are likely to be needed writ large. As well, a related objective is to move U.S. forces closer to global transport nodes and infrastructure in order to facilitate their rapid movement to wherever they are required.[111] Extensive pre-positioning of heavy equipment and supplies in the vicinity of key transit nodes is another core element of this approach to developing generic capabilities to move forces rapidly around the globe to crisis regions as needed.

Though there will still be some major global main bases or "hubs" in traditional areas of U.S. presence – e.g., in the UK, Japan, Germany (Ramstein) – increasing prominence will be placed on less permanent facilities and even on so-called "warm" areas, where the United States only deploys periodically but maintains "skeleton infrastructure" and perhaps extremely small numbers of troops to facilitate use of the site, when needed. Though the nomenclature within the Pentagon is still developing, the terms "forward operating bases" and "forward operating locations" are most commonly associated with the notion of more austere, scaled down, semi-permanent bases.[112]

The forward operating bases, or FOBs, would entail limited, fixed infrastructure and semi-permanent deployments of troops, but unaccompanied by dependents. The forward operating locations, or FOLs, would be the lowest rung on the basing ladder, the "warm areas" that would only be occupied intermittently, according to need. In Central Asia today, Karshi-Khanabad and Manas would be examples of FOBs, while various sites inside Afghanistan where U.S. forces have established temporary presence would serve as examples of FOLs.

Using this new parlance, our recommendation for Central Asia is to establish at least one alternate FOB, in Kazakhstan, at the most suitable of the three airfields where we now have emergency landing privileges – Almaty, Chimkent, or Lugovoi. The other two sites should become FOLs, and there should also be a deliberate effort to establish one or more FOLs in Tajikistan. The purpose of the Tajik FOLs would be to facilitate efforts to monitor and interdict the drug trade (and conceivably the smuggling of WMD-related components or weapons) and also to serve as a hedge if a FOB needed to be set up in Tajikistan to support SOF units in Afghanistan in the event of worst-case scenarios regarding a Taliban resurgence or the rise of some other anti-Western

111 Ibid.

112 Robert Schlesinger, "U.S. Remaking Look, Locations of Bases Abroad," *The Boston Globe*, July 7, 2003, Lexis-Nexis.

Islamist faction. As well, FOLs should be explored as the first step in U.S. deployments to Indian territory, a step that would both cement the growing security relationship between New Delhi and Washington, while also serving as a hedge if more robust presence in India were required (i.e., FOBs) in the event of a downward spiral in Pakistan.

The primary motivation for the planned global realignment of U.S. forces is, as we have noted, the uncertainty of the direction and nature of security challenges in the twenty-first century. But a force posture based less on large, permanent facilities and more on contingency access agreements would also afford important political and diplomatic benefits. Fewer fixed facilities will decrease the ability of any one state to hold the United States "hostage" to access. In turn, diversification of FOB and FOL options will enable the United States to be more aggressive in pressing states for political and economic reforms that benefit their people. This is the core of the argument put forward in this study: that with increased basing options come greater opportunities to take steps through public and private diplomacy that help the United States engage more successfully "hearts and minds," which, more and more, is regarded as a core element of the GWOT. Doing so, over the long term, will be as important to success in the war against terrorism – and specifically to "draining the swamp" of radicalized anti-Americanism – as kinetic combat operations. This will be true, not only in Central Asia, but also in other key theaters of the GWOT, such as the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia.

Core Elements of U.S. Strategy towards Central Asia

With that as background, it is possible to lay out specific steps and policy choices that the United States should consider with respect to its strategy towards Central Asia.

- *Continue to support development of nationally oriented civil society in Central Asia.* The development of strong, functional, secular political organizations in Central Asia remains a primary challenge for ensuring long-term stability in this region. The United States should continue to support grassroots efforts focused on human rights defense and other issues which may eventually resonate with public opinion and which, over time, could provide the basis for cohesive political movements capable of acting as a functional opposition to the ruling regime in states like Uzbekistan. Particularly in Uzbekistan, there are limited groups

to "grab onto" and support as alternatives to the current regime. Cultivating alternate centers of political power will require time and sustained effort.

- *Begin establishing closer security links with Kazakhstan.* While we should not rush to christen Kazakhstan as "the Georgia of Central Asia," it nonetheless appears to have the best prospects for political and economic development over the long term. Nazarbayev and his inner circle remain a real impediment to ultimate change, but movements such as the DCK and *Ak Zhol* constitute the brightest (albeit imperfect) hopes for a functional opposition to a Central Asian government. Kazakhstan also has the strongest resource base of the five Central Asian states and has shown (comparatively) the greatest willingness to listen to international economic advice. Combined, these factors make Kazakhstan a better long-term bet than Uzbekistan, though as we proceed with greater engagement with Astana we will, of course, have to keep our eyes firmly open for any signs that closer partnership with the United States is interpreted by the regime as a go-ahead for repression (as it has been in Uzbekistan). Specific steps on the ground would involve developing the FOB and FOLs as discussed above and also possibly moving ISR assets based in the region, such as *Predator*, from Uzbekistan to Kazakhstan as a first step in diversifying U.S. assets.

- *Give Uzbekistan a January 2006 deadline to demonstrate real progress on economic and political reform*. Convey privately to the Uzbek leadership that if it is to remain an important regional partner of the United States, it has to show real commitment – and not simply token gestures – to the establishment of a functional, rule-of-law state, with an economy capable of supporting the welfare of the Uzbek people. If substantive steps in this direction are not forthcoming in the next twenty-four months, the United States should be prepared to leave K2 by the end of 2005 and redeploy its forces either in Kazakhstan or at another facility in the region that makes best operational sense depending on the situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan at that time.

- *Consider options for responding proactively in the event of opportunities for change in Turkmenistan.* The one true "wild card" in Central Asia is the fate of "Turkmenbashi." Given his physical ailments and Orwellian regime, it is easy to postulate that he may depart the scene suddenly, through natural causes or otherwise. In this event, there might be a short window

for the United States and the international community to act to support a normalization of life for the Turkmen people and to support a reconstruction of Turkmen institutions along rule-of-law lines. Turkmenistan becoming a normal, functional state in the region would impact a number of core issues including pipeline routes and disposition of resources in the Caspian. From the perspective of U.S. strategic interests, Turkmenistan would present a natural strategic window on Iran and the Middle East more broadly and possibly offer access to the facility at Mary (though this base doubtless will require significant refurbishment.) In short, there may be opportunities – for the United States and for the Turkmen people – that will need to be seized in the event of Turkmenbashi's death or overthrow. We should begin considering now how to respond, as the turmoil surrounding the Turkmen despot's departure also could create opportunities for unwanted outcomes – such as the rise of a younger dictator or unwelcome meddling by Tehran or Moscow.

- *Apply U.S. national resources towards the interdiction of the drug trade in Central and South Asia.* If efforts toward the reconstruction of Afghanistan progress along positive trend-lines, the United States should increasingly apply military assets – perhaps in conjunction with international/Allied contributions – towards undercutting the opiate industry and narcotics trade in Central and South Asia. Overall, the United States needs to begin implementing the "three-pronged" approach to counter-drug policy in Central Asia that it has adopted in Latin America. That is, military interdiction efforts need to be combined with promotion of alternate cash crops and with the development of effective local law enforcement capabilities. Such an effort has the potential, in the near term, to be resource intensive. This is why, as well, the United States needs to attract international support for this objective, calling upon the G-8 nations and its allies in the war on terror to participate in a comprehensive Central Asian counter-drug effort. Considering the vital role the opiate trade plays in funding extremist terrorist organizations, greater application of U.S. military force (and other instruments of national power) to this task will be a sound investment.

- *Identify Central Asia as a priority area for the PSI.* With its robust smuggling networks, Central Asia is an ideal conduit for transfers of WMD-related components and technologies. This could take the form of either deliberate state-to-state transfers (e.g., North Korea to

Pakistan) or shipments from state to non-state actors (e.g., an Islamist-led Pakistan to Al Qaeda or the Taliban). "Loose nukes" or biological weapons from the former Soviet Union also remain a lingering concern. As the United States and its partners continue to work towards operationalizing the PSI, Central Asia needs to be identified as a priority area for internationally coordinated counter-proliferation efforts. Advanced U.S. ISR assets need to be programmed for long-term use in Central Asia to assist in this endeavor (as well as to support counter-drug operations).

- *Transform the U.S. "footprint" in Central Asia.* Overall, the combination of "white" SOF units working with regional militaries on counter-drug efforts coupled with the application of U.S. ISR assets to tasks related to narcotics/proliferation interdiction points to a scaled-down U.S. presence in Central Asia, less focused on combat forces and based more on small-footprint assets at opposite ends of the technological spectrum. This combination can maximize the U.S. contribution to regional security while limiting both the number of forces and the amount of infrastructure we require.

- *Incorporate Central Asia directly into public diplomacy statements on democracy in the Muslim world.* The decision to begin publicly calling on key Middle Eastern states – including recognized U.S. partners like Egypt and Saudi Arabia – to pursue true democratic reform is a welcome development in U.S. policy. That said, U.S. silence on democracy in Central Asia stands in obvious contrast to this approach and risks promulgating the view held in the Muslim world of a hypocritical United States willing to forsake its principles in exchange for economic or military advantage. If the promotion of positive economic and political change throughout the Muslim world is to be a core element of our strategy in the "battle of ideas," Central Asia needs to be addressed as well. Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan could easily have been mentioned in the same context as Saudi Arabia and Egypt during President Bush's November 2003 speech at the National Endowment for Democracy. Central Asia should receive equal billing in subsequent statements by senior officials on the need for political change in key states of the Muslim world.

- *Be willing to accept Chinese and Russian interests in Central Asia so long as they do not impede core GWOT objectives.* The United States should not allow itself to fall into the

trap of viewing involvement in Central Asia through either a Cold War paradigm or Great Game construct that encourages a zero-sum interpretation of geopolitical developments. The opening of the Russian/CSTO base at Kant or the institution of the SCO's counter-terrorism exercises are not inherently counter to U.S. interests and should not be viewed as such. Both China and Russia have their own interests in seeing this region stabilized and in supporting the defeat of Islamic extremism. Pushing back on Chinese and Russian security initiatives is thus counterproductive and there might actually be diplomatic benefits (in Central Asia itself and on other regional and global issues where the United States seeks support from Moscow and Beijing) to engaging the CSTO and SCO more actively. NATO could be one conduit for exploring combined exercises with Russian forces in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; the planned SCO anti-terrorism center in Tashkent could be one avenue for exploring U.S. cooperation with the SCO.

- *Look to India as a long-term partner in Central and South Asia.* While continuing to buttress the current Pakistani regime to the extent feasible, the United States should proceed with deepening its security relationship with India, up to and including the establishment of FOLs (as described above) as a hedging step against the potential loss of Pakistani infrastructure. Close ties between Washington and New Delhi can also be leveraged to help promote the initial steps Prime Minister Vajpayee and President Musharraf are taking towards resolving the festering and dangerous dispute over Kashmir. An effective and lasting settlement on this issue would significantly stabilize the sub-continent and would yield residual benefits for the overall security situation in the Middle East and Central Asia as well.

- *Leverage the potential of robust sea-basing to support U.S. strategic and operational objectives*. For much of the "arc of instabiltiy" and with respect to prosecuting the war on terror, the evolving sea-basing concept is projected to provide the United States with a means to access combat regions when forward basing is not available or when political constraints on U.S. access have been put in place by host nations. Sea-basing is not a panacea, but it is an option that we should develop as a national strategic asset.