

GREAT POWERS AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA: a local perspective

Mario Esteban and Nicolás de Pedro
(eds.)



Eds. Mario Esteban and Nicolás de Pedro
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Published by Exlibris Ediciones S.L.
Infanta Mercedes, 92 - 28020 Madrid - Tel: 91 571 70 51
exlibrisediciones.com
Edited by: Dinarte S.L.
Printed by: Desk Impresores S.L.
ISBN: 978-84-95028-86-0
Legal Deposit: M-2960-2009

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Introduction

The interest and action of all the great powers of the international system come together in Central Asia. Great power's interaction, cooperative as well as competitive, conditions the present and the future of Central Asia, a region of rising importance, as much by its hydrocarbon reserves and their geostrategic location as by the challenges and risks that it confronts. This way, Central Asia is a politically complex scenario, but simultaneously a region rich in opportunities.

Russia, China and the United States, each with their own regional agenda, play a preeminent role in Central Asia, whereas the EU has still not been able to articulate a solid project and to gain visibility in accordance with the level of its ambitions. At the same time, other actors like South Korea, India, Iran or Pakistan have an increasing role in the region and they are catching up with actors with a more consolidated position like Turkey and Japan. This monograph deals with the foreign powers that enjoy stronger influence in Central Asia: Russia, the United States, China, Turkey, Japan and the European Union. All these six actors have a comprehensive regional strategy, which goes beyond their bilateral relations with the five former Soviet Central Asian republics.

The five republics agree in fortifying regional cooperation, although to different extents. So far they have failed in their attempts to build regional cooperation by themselves and their dependency on Russia, China, and the

United States has been thus reinforced. Each of these three great powers leads or promotes its own process of regional cooperation.

Moscow heads the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). The CSTO includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan besides Russia. CSTO is the more developed project of military cooperation and integration in Central Asia to date, thanks to the political will shown by their members. This multilateral organization is complemented by the bilateral agreements subscribed between the five republics and Moscow, which turn Russia into the main security guarantor for Central Asia. In addition, Russia promotes regional economic integration through EurAsEC, which includes all the CSTO members but Armenia, which along with Ukraine and Moldova has observer status. When writing these lines, Uzbekistan has announced its retirement of the EurAsEC.

China plays an increasing role in central Asia and leads the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which also comprises Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The SCO is the more dynamic multilateral forum of the region, spurred by the unstoppable rise of China, whose commercial, economic and military power expands with growing impetus throughout the region.

The United States have devised the Greater Central Asia (GCA) project, whose main aim is to reinvigorate the ties between Central and Southern Asia, especially among the five republics with Afghanistan and Pakistan. The GCA Partnership Project was conceived in U.S. academic circles and taken up by foreign policy community. Following this new design, the State Department merged its sections of Southern and Central Asia in early the 2006 to create the Bureau of South and Central Asia, which covers Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Turkey has promoted an active cooperation initiative among the Turkic-speaking countries, which comprises Turkey, the four Turkic Central Asian states, and Azerbaijan. In spite of difficulties and different views about cul-

tural and linguistic affinities among Turkic republics the ‘Turkic summits’ still have great potential for development.

Japan is the biggest donor for the region and it has launched the ‘Central Asia plus Japan’ dialogue, an initiative for regional cooperation that includes all five Central Asian states and Afghanistan as a guest. It can be speculated that it is not only a mechanism to promote regional integration, but to some extent, also an attempt to counterbalance the growing influence of China in the region through the creation of an alternative to the SCO regional cooperation arrangement. Similarly to the European Union, Japan is a frequently underestimated key actor.

The European Union adopted in July of 2007 “The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership”, which reflects Brussels’ hopes of fostering its influence in a region of mounting strategic importance for Europe. The objectives of the European Union are not limited to energy security, but they also include a political, an economic, a social and a cultural dimension, since the evolution of those issues in Central Asia has a direct and an indirect impact in the own security and interest of the EU. The endorsement of this document is a landmark in the promotion of the role of the European Union in Central Asia, although it has some significant deficiencies like its disregard for Central Asia geopolitical context. This lack of analysis on the geopolitical context of the region and on the interests and actions of the other main external actors in the strategic exposition of the EU, poses important questions about the viability of the Strategy and about its comprehensive approach. Central Asia is not isolated, but inside a very complex international context that cannot be ignored by any actor with ambitious objectives in the region.

This book intends to fulfil this gap with new contributions and debates that help to increase our understanding of Central Asia geopolitical dynamics. A detailed analysis of the stances and policies of the great powers and of their reception by the local actors allows us first to identify potential similarities and divergences between the interests of the European Union and those of the rest of the main extra-regional actors; and second to detect

which points of the Central Asia strategy of those actors have generated more support and more rejection in the region. This could be a fruitful ground for designing proposals leading to a more effective EU action in Central Asia. At the same time, this kind of approach provides deeper knowledge of the risks and challenges faced by the region and the possible scenarios the European Union must be prepared to.

The present volume is a collection of papers originally presented in an international seminar jointly organized by Fundación Alternativas and the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research (KIMEP) in Almaty on 12 September 2008. The first five papers have been written by well-known local experts and the last chapter has been elaborated by the Expert Adviser on Central Asia of the Fundación Alternativas. Each paper examines the role of one of the main extra-regional powers who have a comprehensive strategy for Central Asia, emphasizing the local perception on the involvement of these actors in the five former Soviet Central Asian republics.

The seminar benefited from active participation and positive comments from a delegation of the Fundación Alternativas, several members of KIMEP faculty, and representatives from other local and European think tanks. We owe a debt to all of them for raising the level of the discussions with their contributions. In this sense, we are particularly grateful to Mr. Jens Beikuefner, Political Adviser to the EU Special Representative Central Asia, for attending the seminar on his last days destined in Kazakhstan as Head of the Regional Office of the EU in Almaty.

With the above mentioned seminar and this resulting monograph, the Fundación Alternativas aspires to present a modest contribution to the Central Asia policy of the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in 2010. Central Asia is not among the traditional priorities of the Spanish foreign policy, but Spain interests in Central Asia are significant and the relation with Kazakhstan, country that exerts the regional leadership, is close and very solid. A greater Spanish presence in central Asia and Eurasia, not only facilitates a better defence of its interest in the region, but also contributes

to enhance the position of Spain in Brussels, since the region conforms a strategic axis (Europe-Turkey-South Caucasus-Central Asia) of increasing relevance for the European Union and its main Member States. For that reason such an Europeist country as Spain should increase its presence of the region. The anticipated opening of new embassies in Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia is excellent news for setting the foundations for a robust and lasting relation with the region.

The book is made up of six chapters which review the strategy and action of the six main extra-regional actors in central Asia. Nikolay Kuzmin opens this volume reviewing the current state and the main trends in Russian politics in Central Asia. He groups Russian interests in this region into four categories (non-traditional threats; economic concerns; “soft power” influence; and the management of relations with other powers) and analyzes how they vary from one country to another, largely according to the availability of mineral resources in those countries. He argues that Russian presence is, on the whole, positive for the stability of the region, and that this situation explains why Russian-centered projects (EurAsEC, CSTO, and SCO) are much more durable and successful than pure Central Asian ones.

In chapter 2, Adil Kaukenov examines Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia at the current stage. After looking into the factors which underpin China’s Central Asia strategy, he emphasizes the rising Chinese influence in the region, especially through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. He therefore pays great attention to this organization, analyzing its current situation, problems, tendencies and perspectives. Kaukenov also provides a detailed account on how the Chinese presence is evaluated in the five Central Asian republics and by different segments of the population.

Murat Laumulin’s chapter 3 evaluates US geopolitical experience in Central Asia. He regards US policy in Central Asia as a part of a broader Eurasian strategy that touches upon the Caspian and the Caucasian regions, Russia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Asia and China along with the region. Besides, criticizing US approach to the region for being too focused on the military arena, Laumulin points to the maintenance of Central Asian

states within the orbit of Russia, Moscow's control of the oil and gas export routs from the region, the authoritarian character of the local regimes, the underdevelopment of local civil societies, and the reduction of US military and strategic presence in the region as its major failures. He also mentions important US contributions to the region as backing the independence of the five former Soviet Republics, reducing the ascendance of Islamic radicalism and removing the danger of weapons of mass destruction proliferation.

Zharmukhamed Zardykhan's Chapter 4 underlines the pioneering diplomatic activity conducted by Turkey in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Being the first country to recognize their independent statehood and to establish diplomatic relations, Turkey became Central Asia's gate to the outside world for some years. Being a prominent member of the NATO and the Council of Europe, and enjoying well-established economic and political relations with the West, Turkey did offer considerable moral and material support for the devastated economies of the Central Asian states at the time of their early experience of independence. The article, however, also analyzes the impediments to the realization of the Turkish endeavors concerning congenial Central Asian states and the gradual evolution of the Turkish policy towards Central Asia from somewhat effusive to pragmatic.

Chapter 5 focuses on Japan's strategy in Central Asia. Nargis Kassenova underlines that Japan has been trying to develop an effective approach to the region, since the establishment of diplomatic relations with the five former Soviet Republics. Tokyo has made a serious commitment as a development assistance provider, but has found challenging to shape a policy that would be a component of a general Eurasian strategy. Kassenova argues that Japan can not fulfil that task alone and need a partner in the region, and the EU can become such a partner, since both share a set of values, have a proclivity to cooperative and multilateral approaches, and assume responsibility for peace and security in the Eurasian space.

In the closing chapter, Nicolas de Pedro analyses the EU's role in Central Asia and makes some recommendations to enhance it. The chapter first

includes a chronological examination of the EU's involvement through the 1990s up to the adoption in 2007 of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia. Second, an assessment of the main elements of this Strategy followed by a critical evaluation of the European Union's perspectives and actions bearing in mind the regional geopolitical context, the chapter then makes an evaluation of the areas in which the interests of Brussels in matters of energy resources, security and stability, are compatible or divergent with the interests of the other main actors in the region. Finally, in the last section, the chapter explores some European Union's comparative advantages to strengthen its presence in the region.

Mario Esteban and Nicolás de Pedro

Madrid, December 2008

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Central Asia: the Sphere of Russia's Privileged Interests

Nikolay Kuzmin

Although Russia has neither a special strategy document on Central Asia, nor a special chapter in its official foreign policy concept devoted to this region, there is wide agreement in Moscow on a rather broad set of “interests” (whether they are strategic is another matter) in the five former Soviet republics. These interests may be grouped into four categories:

- a. Non-traditional security matters;
- b. Economic concerns;
- c. the promotion of “Eurasian” values, Russian information and “soft power” influence;
- d. the management of relations with other powers with strategic interests in Central Asia.

The threat of terrorism is related to the proximity of Afghanistan and the connection between al Qaeda and some indigenous Central Asian militant groups. Central Asia itself, notably the Ferghana Valley, may generate radical Islamic challenges (Hizb ut-Tahrir party is regarded as a major threat by the Karimov government). Another non-traditional threat is drug trafficking and Afghanistan is the source again.

Russian interests in the economic sphere are concentrated on access to and control on gas and, to a somewhat lesser extent, oil reserves of the Caspian basin. Russian strong desire to be the major guarantor of “energy secu-

rity” for Europe makes imperative for Russia to control Central Asian gas flows. Without this resource, Russia will fail to provide its contracted supplies of gas to the European market.

The predominance of Russian soft power is based on the Russian language. The most influential media on the region, both local and from Russia, use Russian language and Russian is still used as a language for local elites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and, to some extent, in Uzbekistan.

One of the main goals of Russia in the region is balancing the U.S. and the Chinese presence, both in the economic and the political arenas. U.S. efforts to promote democracy in Central Asia by supporting the “Tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan aroused Russian concerns about the American presence there. As a result, Russia has intensified its relations with Central Asian countries, emphasizing strong ties with the incumbent regimes. Moscow routinely uses the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a vehicle for balancing the United States in the region and for constraining China’s growing influence.

Changing approach to the region

In order to understand Russia’s foreign policy toward Central Asia and Russian interests in this region, we should take into consideration the current state of affairs and main trends in Russia and the region.

Vladimir Putin inherited the country from Boris Yeltsin with a ruined economy, smoldering armed conflicts, and a poor populace. Russia managed to match its own GDP of 1990 only in 2006. Russia became weak and therefore concentrated on domestic problems. By 1998 Moscow had lost almost all influence in many parts of Eurasia it traditionally dominated.

In 1992 Russia declared itself to be the legal successor of the Soviet Union, thereby assuming responsibility for the treaty obligations of the Soviet Union towards Afghanistan. Later, Russia had taken on treaty obligations to the Central Asian countries, mainly via the Collective security treaty signed in Tashkent in 1992. In spite of this and other obligations, Russia stopped giving

any assistance to the government in Kabul. At the same time, in the early 1990s, Russia significantly reduced its levels of military cooperation with the countries of Central Asia. The plans to create a collective security system in Central Asia (and in the CIS as a whole) came to very little in practice.

Moscow was unable either to prevent the escalation of the internal conflict in Tajikistan, or the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, or the increasing military presence of other powers in the region. For example, when NATO began its “Partnership for Peace” program at the end of 1994, Russia made no serious attempt to coordinate a united response to the program. The only exceptions to this, standing out from the general context of Russian policy at the time, were the activities of the Russian 201st Motor Rifle Division in Tajikistan and the Russian border troops in some of the countries of the region. It was largely due to the efforts of Russian forces in the early 1990s that the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1996) did not result in the destabilization of the whole Central Asia.

That time there were two trends simultaneously unfolding in Russia, both connected to its quest for a new national identity: a traditional identity (that is, Eurasian) and a Western identity (or European). The first materialized in attempts to restore a Eurasia that geographically coincided with the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union as well as in trying to conclude geopolitical alliances with the leading Asian countries (the so-called broader Eurasia). Those who wanted to move westwards were never tired of saying that Russia was unable to play the first fiddle in potential alliances with India and China. They also claimed that prospects of economic cooperation with Asian countries were not tempting, since Russia’s exports to that region were very limited (weapons and military technologies) and the investment potential of the Asian countries in Russia was fairly low. These people said that there is no choice but to “join Europe” and enter into an alliance with the West. This was an alternative to Russia’s Eurasian hypostasis and an option that meets its long-term interests.

Putin stopped political and economic chaos, soothing armed conflicts inside Russia, and restoring a level of social and economic development. As a result, Russia has returned to the world stage as a strong state.

The issues of “unilateral and illegitimate actions” as well as “disdain for international law” and “uncontained hyper use of force” were brought up by Vladimir Putin at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in February 2007. His views are supported by many countries in Eurasia, including Central Asian “stans”.

Central Asian governing elites fear that the U.S. will use the “new quest for democracy” and “war on terror” as a pretext to interfere in their internal affairs. Such an attitude toward U.S. policy in the “non-western world,” especially in the context of events related to the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and Iraq, has resulted in a strong wish to foster regional integration and to find a reliable security umbrella provided by friendly powers – China and Russia.

It is expected that new president Dmitry Medvedev will continue that political course and that the energy dimension will become more salient in Russia’s foreign policy as President Medvedev previously served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of Gazprom.

In August 2008 President Medvedev enumerated five principles of Russian foreign policy in order of their priority. Ranking first is the principle of observation of international law. Second one is multipolarity, which means that Russia will build its foreign policy on the “objective realities of a multipolar world”. Number three: non-confrontational approaches. Number four, the most controversial, maintains that Russia has areas where it has privileged interests. Lastly, the fifth principle enunciated by Medvedev is protecting Russian citizens wherever they are.

As Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov explained during the meeting with the members of the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, on 24 September 2008, Russia is going to develop friendly, mutually advantageous relations with all those who are prepared to reciprocate on an equal and mutually beneficial basis, paying special attention to the traditional partners of the Russian Federation. Of course this includes countries which were part of the USSR, but not only. He said that in the ‘90s, “we were so poor that we could not take care of the immediate needs of our own people and we

couldn't afford and, frankly, didn't even remember about relationships with our old friends”.

New security order in Russia's soft underbelly

The new Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation approved by Dmitry Medvedev on 12 July 2008 proclaimed that international developments in the field of international relations in the beginning of the 21st century and the strengthening of Russia require a reassessment of the overall situation around Russia, rethinking the priorities of the Russian foreign policy with due account for the increased role of the country in international affairs, its greater responsibility for global developments and related possibilities to participate in the implementation of the international agenda, as well as in its development.

One of chief objectives set in this concept is “to promote good neighborly relations with bordering States, to assist in eliminating the existing hotbeds of tension and conflicts in the regions adjacent to the Russian Federation and other areas of the world and to prevent the emergence of new ones”.

The role played by Russia in Central Asia in the 21st century is very similar to that played by the United States in Europe at the end of 20 century. Moscow provides reassurance to the governments of Central Asian. Because no superior power controls relations among them, an attack by one against another is always possible. Governments therefore tend to take steps to prepare to defend themselves. In foreign policy, wariness, suspicion, and preventive measures are the norm. But military preparations that one country undertakes for purely defensive reasons can appear threatening to others, which may then take military measures of their own and so set in motion a spiral of mistrust and military buildups. The Russian military presence in Central Asia acts as a barrier against such an undesirable chain of events.

Medvedev's foreign policy concept declares that today, traditional cumbersome military and political alliances are not effective to counteract the whole range of modern challenges and threats that are transnational in their nature. Bloc approaches to international problems are being replaced by a network diplomacy based on flexible forms of participation in international structures for the search of joint solutions to common challenges. Nevertheless, Russian main instrument of the common security order in Central Asia still is a good old military bloc - the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) comprising the former Soviet republics Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

The Treaty on Collective Security was signed in Tashkent, Uzbekistan on 15 May 1992. CSTO was established on 18 September 2003 in accordance with the decision of the heads of the member-states about transformation of the Treaty into the international regional organization. The main purpose of the Organization is coordination and enhancement of military and political cooperation, development of multilateral structures and mechanisms of cooperation for ensuring national security of the member-states on collective basis, providing assistance, including military one, to the member-states that suffer an aggression.

The transformation of the loose Treaty cooperation into an institutionalized structure (on the CSTO was registered in the UN as a regional international organization on 26 December 2003) reflected Russia's intention to prevent NATO further expansion to the East and to keep CIS countries under Russia's military patronage.

In Article 2, the Treaty indicates: "In case of threat to security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of one or several member-states or threat to international peace and security, the member-states will immediately put into action the mechanism of joint consultations with a view to coordinating their positions and taking measures to eliminate the threat that has emerged".

The Article 4 simultaneously stipulates that: "In case an act of aggression is committed against any of the member-states, all other member-states will render it the necessary assistance, including military one, as well as provide

support with the means at their disposal through an exercise of the right to collective defense in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter”.

The 15th CSTO summit took place in Dushanbe on 6 October 2007. The main result of this summit was to allow CSTO member states to buy Russian weapons and military equipment for their armed forces and special services at the Russian domestic prices. The Memorandum on cooperation between the CSTO and SCO was signed at the summit.

From security to energy security

In the 1990s Russian investments in Kazakhstan were mainly in the Tengiz-Novorossiysk oil pipeline and in the opening of the Karachaganak gas condensate field. The interest of Russia in the other countries of Central Asia remained minimal. With the coming to power of Vladimir Putin in 2000 and the steady rise of hydrocarbons prices, the importance of Central Asia to Moscow grew sharply. As a consequence Russia and Russian oil and gas companies increased their activity in the region, not only in Kazakhstan, but now also in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, dramatically. More recently Moscow has also begun to show greater interest in the two states of the region, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with minimal oil and gas potential. At present, Russian strategic interests mainly concern the three Central Asian states that possess commercial reserves of hydrocarbons: Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In contrast with resources-rich Central Asian countries, Russian interests in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are limited to military presence, and the main topic of economic cooperation is labor migrants.

Against this background, the project and investment activity of individual countries of Central Asia in the oil and gas sectors of Russia remains extremely low for the time being. The single exception is the Russo-Kazakh project on the Orenburg (Russia) gas processing facility for the processing of Kazakh raw material and the joint sale of natural gas on external markets.

In its turn, investment cooperation in the oil and gas sphere between the individual countries of Central Asia also remains weak for the time being, although it can be expected an increase in Kazakh activity in the oil and gas sectors of the other regional states in the coming years.

In 1993, the CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces were established in Tajikistan, based on the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division. Russia played a major role in ending Tajikistan's five-year civil war. Russian soldiers guarded vital facilities during the war and helped the government to maintain power. Russian border guards kept watch on the dangerous Tajik-Afghan border. When the CIS Collective Peacekeeping Forces were disbanded in 2000, Moscow and Dushanbe agreed that a Russian force based on the 201st Division and some logistics units would remain in Tajikistan.

On 23 October 2003 Russian President Vladimir Putin opened the Russian military base in Kant, which became the first Russian military asset deployed outside its national territory since the collapse of the USSR. Officially the base is a component of the Collective Rapid Deployment Force of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and guarantees the security of the CSTO countries and stability in Central Asia in general.

One year later a new stage in the relationship between Tajikistan and Russia opened during a state visit by Russian president Vladimir Putin to Dushanbe. The leaders of Russia and Tajikistan signed a package of bilateral treaties and agreements, including an agreement on the terms of the stationing of Russian forces in Tajikistan. A far-reaching strategic agreement allows Moscow to establish a permanent military base in Tajikistan and gives Russian companies opportunities to gain a dominant position in key Tajik economic sectors.

The Russian Federation is the most important destination country for labor migrants from the other CIS countries, including those from Central Asia. According to World Bank data, the money sent by migrant workers comprises 36% of Tajikistan GDP and 27% of Kyrgyzstan GDP. In 2007 the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan estimated that remittances sent by labor migrants were equal to the annual state budget, US\$750 million.

Uzbekistan always seeks to play a leading role in regional affairs. President Islam Karimov tried to upgrade political ties with the United States, while maintaining stable working relations with Russia and China, until May 2005. After 9-11 terrorist attacks, President Karimov signed an agreement on strategic partnership with the United States, thinking the Americans would be more sympathetic to his oppressive measures against militant Islamic groups. The situation changed in Andijon on May 13, 2005.

An armed group stormed a prison in Andijon and released hundreds of inmates on 12 May 2005. The next day they stormed government buildings in this city. Uzbek troops fired on a crowd, which contained armed Islamic militants, but largely composed of women and children. The United States and Western countries have called for an international investigation of these events, which Karimov has rejected.

Russian senior government officials, Russian intelligence and security services told Karimov that this was a terrorist uprising, and claimed that they had clear evidence that some of the rioters were hard-core terrorists from Afghanistan. According to testimony of alleged Andijon terrorists, the government of the United States had financed and supported the terrorists' attempt to establish an Islamic caliphate. Regardless of official statements, many people in Uzbekistan, whether in government or in opposition, believed that Americans were behind the riots in Andijon. All that enabled Russia to take full advantage of the situation. Central Asian leaders believed that facing terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism they only could get real help from Moscow. Therefore, Uzbekistan joined EurAsEC in January 2006 and rejoined the Collective Security Treaty Organization in December that year.

In September 2008 during Vladimir Putin's visit to Tashkent, Russia and Uzbekistan agreed to build a new pipeline through Uzbekistan to export Turkmen and Uzbek natural gas. The new pipeline and the modernization of the 1974 Central Asia-Center pipeline network will raise combined Uzbek-Turkmen exports from the current 45 billion cubic meters to 80-90 billion cubic meters a year. That will allow Moscow to maintain its mono-

poly on Central Asian gas exports to Europe and help bolster its influence in the region.

Meantime, Uzbekistan remains the weakest link in the Russian chain of regional organizations. In November 2008, Islam Karimov proclaimed EurAsEC useless and inefficient and thus suspended his country membership.

At the end of 2007, the total volume of Russian investments in the oil and gas sectors in the countries of Central Asia was between 4 and 5.2 billion dollars. By far the greatest share is concentrated in Kazakhstan (from approximately 3.4 to 4.1 billion dollars); there is a smaller share in Uzbekistan (from 0.5 to 1 billion dollars) and a so far insignificant amount in Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (50 million dollars in total). Russian companies aim to invest approximately between 14 and 16 billion dollars over the next five years in the region, primarily in the search for and development of oil and natural gas fields, but also in pipeline infrastructure.

Nursultan Nazarbayev explained in a television interview on 6 April 2007 that pragmatic economic considerations—the search for the most cost-effective options—underpinned his government's support for multiple pipelines: "If it is beneficial for us to transport all Kazakhstan's oil and gas through Russia, we will go that way. If transportation via Baku-Ceyhan is 15 dollars cheaper, we will go that way. And if neither is beneficial, we will go to China."

Until now, the overwhelming share of Kazakh oil has been transported northward through Russia. Yet, Kazakh officials are aware of the dangers of relying on Russian-controlled transportation routes, which allows Moscow to unilaterally decide how much oil can leave the country and to which destination it can flow. It will still take several years before many of Kazakhstan's oil and gas projects begin to produce enough output to sustain these new export routes, especially given that much of the country's existing energy production is locked in long-term preferential agreements with Russian energy companies. Nevertheless, Kazakh exporters have increased negotiating leverage with Russia thanks to their expanding export options and Gazprom was forced on 11 March 2008 to agree to start paying considerably

higher prices in 2009 for the natural gas it purchases from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. In the past, the company had been able to buy Central Asian gas at below-market rates and then resell it on European markets with a hefty markup. Increasing competition from possible European and especially Chinese buyers compelled the Russian energy firm to increase its payments.

Kazakh Prime minister Karim Masimov in his welcoming speech at the Third KazEnergy Forum on 4 September 2008 stressed that Kazakhstan “will continue to vigorously implement a strategy of diversification of energy export routes (...) the country will also maintain its existing multi-vector policy with a special emphasis on the safety of these routes. On that basis, specific routes will be selected exclusively on the basis of economic viability and practical considerations. As before, our country will participate in all major Eurasian energy transportation projects, including CPC, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Kazakhstan – China, Burgas-Alexandroupolis and Prikaspiisky gas pipeline.”

Russian interest in Central Asian hydrocarbons is explained to a large extent by their technically simpler and economically more advantageous extraction conditions than in the north of Russia, where the overwhelming majority of Russian oil and gas fields are concentrated. Russia is striving to drag as large a part as possible of the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia into its own fuel-energy balances in order to support internal consumption, without simultaneously lowering the volumes of its own hydrocarbon exports to external markets, first and foremost to Europe.

Meanwhile, Kazakhstan does not set its oil and gas policy alone. In this respect its independence is very relative. Astana believes that it is necessary to take account of the interests of consumers and transit countries, especially now when a growing number of actors in take an interest in Kazakhstan. This explains why the government tries to make compromises and serve the conflicting parties' interests. Such behavior is due to the fact that private companies, including the foreign ones, control the majority of the Kazakh energy resources. Lately, the state has been trying to be more engaged in the

energy sphere. For all that, the Kazakh state does not dominate in the oil and gas sphere and the efforts to consolidate the state-controlled assets do not simply reproduce the Russian pattern of relations with the foreign partners.

This is also true of Kazakhstan requiring that the Italian company Eni and its partners share their rights to manage the Kashagan deposit. This project is being developed in accordance with the Product Sharing Agreement. It is clear that given the current high prices, such an agreement is bad for the state. So, it comes natural that Astana attempts to revise the agreement's terms. As a rule, an environmental factor (claimed damages related to investor's activity) is being used to bring pressure on Western companies.

As regards the Kashagan deposit, Kazakhstan is interested, above all, in increasing the controlled share, and then, in the stable oil and gas production. Now the state budget is completely independent from petrodollars, since all the energy incomes arrive at the national fund. Moreover, Kazakhstan makes too many petrodollars which cause a kind of Dutch disease. The Kashagan oil and gas are embedded inconveniently, and for the time being there are no reliable technologies to supply the energy resources to the export pipe. In this context, Kazakhstan is happy that the Kashagan resources will be produced later.

On September 26, the lower house of the Kazakh parliament approved legislation authorizing the government unilaterally to alter contracts with firms involved in extracting the country's mineral resources if such changes were necessary to uphold Kazakhstan's economic and security interests.

Still, the situation with the foreign partners is far from the nationalization scenario. In the present situation different actors, mainly Kazakhstan, Russia, and China, share the exploitation of the hydrocarbons and various channels transport the local energy resources abroad.

On the whole, multi-vector energy policy is peculiar to the Central Asian countries. For example, Turkmenistan simultaneously develops the projects of construction of the Caspian and Transcaspian pipelines. The Turkmen President signs documents with Russia for developing one project, announ-

ces that the other must be developed and builds a pipeline to supply energy to China. In the case of Kazakhstan, the EU regards supply independence from Russia as a dividend from cooperation with Astana. However, Kazakhstan does not find itself dependent on Russia. The same is true with the U.S. While Russian President Vladimir Putin often visits the Central Asian countries (and not only the capitals) showing interest in the joint projects, the local elites consider that the U.S. does not pay as much attention to the region and illustrate this point criticizing George W. Bush for not visiting Kazakhstan after being in Mongolia in November 2005.

Not to mention the politics. Moscow is not pleased with the strengthening of the presidential power in Kazakhstan and Nursultan Nazarbayev's unwillingness to resign – straightforward version of same kind of authoritarianism as Russian, slightly decorated one. For all that, Russia continues to support the Kazakh leader and his policy including within the SCO and the Eurasian Economic Community. The Kazakh elites recognize this fact and, consequently, although all foreign actors theoretically have equal chances in to expand their interests in the country, Russia and China are favored for the political support they provide to Nazarbayev.

Kazakhstan has always had its own energy strategy different from that of Russia. When discussing perspectives of Kazakhstan's joining one or another project, we should not forget that Kazakh oil is produced by private, mainly foreign, companies. For example, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil-pipeline is filled by private companies. Energy production is going to increase, and hence Kazakhstan is going to diversify its export routes. A practical step is taken towards China and a rather symbolic one towards the Caucasus. Kazakhstan takes great interest in the Burgas-Alexandroupolis project and the Turkish project. At the same time the Aktau-Samara and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium are still of interests to Kazakhstan. The Kazakh government also takes into consideration such exotic routes as oil transportation through Iran to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Kazakhstan's refusal to participate in the Warsaw energy summit is not a principled stand. That does not mean that Kazakhstan will be only on

friendly terms with some countries and will not be with others. Kazakhstan is considering all the projects and choosing the most lucrative ones. The quicker the export routes are being diversified, the more flexible Russia's position comes to be on technical accessibility of the Russian routes for Kazakh oil. Due to the diversification policy, Kazakhstan's positions in talks become stronger.

Russian interests in Turkmenistan are limited to the gas sector. At present Gazprom is thinking the possibility of offering investments with control of the Turkmen national gas transportation system. Gazprom had already secured agreements in May 2007 to take operational control of the Turkmen section of the regional gas transportation system (following modernization and expansion). At present, such companies as Gazprom and the ITERA International Group of Companies are working in Turkmenistan. Project and investment activities of Russia and Russian companies in the oil and gas sectors of Turkmenistan are still extremely low; it encompasses only the gas transportation area and is directed towards the supply of technical equipment for the gas sector of Turkmenistan from Russia, the renovation and modernization of gas pipelines, compression and distribution stations, etc.

Nevertheless, considering the significant gas reserves of Turkmenistan, one can assume that in the near future the investment activity of Russian companies will increase dramatically. Gazprom alone plans to invest not less than 2 billion dollars in the gas sector of Turkmenistan (primarily in the development of gas fields, but also in the expansion of the SATs arterial pipeline) by 2012. Furthermore, it is most likely that other Russian or joint companies will operate in Turkmenistan, in the first instance Lukoil and TNK–BP.

Bearing in mind that Russia attaches exceptionally great importance to increasing the volume of imported Turkmen gas, the major expansion of gas transportation capabilities of Turkmenistan towards Russia has crucial importance for Moscow. At the moment the throughput capacity of the Turkmen section of SATs is about 50 billion cubic meters per year and it has practically reached full capacity. However, the nature, scale and timelines for

the project of reconstruction and modernization of the Turkmen gas pipelines with Russian participation are unclear yet.

On the contrary, Russian companies are not showing any special interest in the development of the offshore oil and gas fields. This is largely because the offshore fields that interest Russia are located near the Turkmen-Iranian maritime border. The status of the Caspian Sea has not yet been defined, and Iran is insisting on an increase in the size of its section. In addition, the opening of offshore fields is technically more difficult than on land and is therefore more expensive.

Considering the international attractive of regional hydrocarbon resources, there is a growing likelihood that certain alliances will form in and around Central Asia. The manifestation of this trend is already visible today in the framework of the SCO. The settlement of disputes related to the more than probable conflicts of interest between producer states of hydrocarbons and consumer states, was the main reason behind the establishment of the SCO “Energy Club”. The Russian Ministry of Industry and Energy advocates that the SCO “Energy Club” should function in a first stage as a non-governmental consultative body, envisaging “the creation of an information and discussion arena for the detailed consideration of the energy strategies of SCO member states regarding their positions and proposals for improving energy security” as its main task.

However, it is still too early to make prognoses about how effective the future activity of the “Club” will be. This may only become clear after the implementation of several pilot projects on the regulation at a multilateral level of the interests of some of its members in a scenario of fiercer international competition for Central Asian energy resources. On the other hand, it is obvious that further development of the idea of an “Energy Club” within the SCO could lead to a general change in the character of the Central Asian oil and gas cooperation with Russia and China, and also to a significant amendment of Moscow’s energy strategy.

In addition, the appearance of other energy alliances with Central Asia is also possible. However, the strategic interests of all the major external forces

will, most probably, only touch upon increasing the volumes of extraction and transportation of hydrocarbons from the region. For this reason, forming alliances for energy interests will only assist in strengthening the raw material export orientation of the oil and gas sectors of the countries of the region while, at the same time, weakening the Russian position there.

Russian energy officials and companies have long been interested in gaining access to Kazakhstan's large stocks of uranium to supplement Russia's domestic production, which Russian experts fear may prove insufficient to meet the growing international demand for nuclear energy. In July 2006, Russia and Kazakhstan agreed to launch three joint ventures, with an estimated cost of \$10 billion, to conduct uranium mining, uranium enrichment (at Angarsk in eastern Siberia), and to develop low- and medium-power nuclear reactors. Kazakhstan thereby became the first foreign country to join Russia's international uranium enrichment center at Angarsk, which will manufacture nuclear fuel for delivery to countries with civilian nuclear power plants that lack their own uranium enrichment capabilities. Russia's nuclear industry is also eager to build new nuclear power plants in Kazakhstan (the Soviet-era plant in Aktau ceased operating in 1999).

Shared values

One of the best experts on Central Asia, Fabrizio Vielmini, (associate Research Fellow at Istituto Studi di Politica Internazionale, Milan) finds it absolutely logical and justifiable that Russia should promote its own policy in the region.

"Russia has been the main player in Eurasia for three centuries. Russia is what German geopolitics defines as a *Raumordnung* factor. It is the organizer of the infrastructures, the main vector of modernity for peoples who have found themselves apart from the global civilization. Central Asian peoples were in decline for three centuries on end, right until the late 19th century when Russia gave them a chance to reckon with modern technical

advancements and opened their territories to world interchanges,” - said he in an interview to the “Fergana.ru” information agency.

“I’ve been studying Russia and what impresses me is its unique ability to incorporate other peoples and cultures, granting their elites a place in the complex mechanism of its imperial structure. Other imperial expansions usually resulted in immense losses, fomented by attempts to level everything up, caused, in their turn, by the center’s fear of internal differences. Russia, on the other hand, showed a unique capacity not only to integrate a number of different national elements, but also to make these incorporations an additional asset of its own promotion in world affairs.

This is particularly visible in Central Asia, whose opening and development should be considered among the Russian empire’s best accomplishments in history. Today’s Central Asians are well aware of it, since the majority of them (those who do not live off the budgets of their respective independent states) are clearly willing to find themselves in some new geopolitical formation together with Russia.

Regrettable as it is, however, the capacity to elaborate a coherent policy has never recovered since the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Today, Russia lacks a clear strategy in Central Asia. The Kremlin is moving according to a utilitarian, short-term approach, which is tainted by a number of potential risks.

It is worth to note that no matter how ethnocentric Central Asian ruling elites may be, they see Russia as a guarantor of their stability. Moscow remains the main meeting place for Central Asians presidents. Russian influence does not depend on the share of ethnic Russian residents in the region.

The common cultural and linguistic background created throughout centuries by numerous generations in the Russian Empire epoch and the Soviet era is almost fully exhausted. All Central Asian countries (except for Tajikistan) are members of Turksoy - organization of cooperation among the Turkic speaking countries in the fields of culture and arts. But Russian is de-facto the second official language of this organization, as well as de-facto

language of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek ruling elites. For millions of Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz workers Russian language is a precondition for finding a job. Of course English tends to take a position of business language, and the number of students of Mandarin grows rapidly. Anyway, the supremacy of Russian soft power and Russian language in the region seems indisputable in the foreseeable future.

Kazakhstan's national interests, no matter how formulated at any specific moment of its history, have included and will include in the future friendly and allied relations with Russia. This cooperation rests on long-term geopolitical factors that have already determined much that is in common between them. Kazakhstan is a Central Asian country to the same extent as Britain is a European country, therefore there is an analogy, albeit an extremely slight one, between the special relations between the U.S. and U.K. and between Russia and Kazakhstan. In fact, today the Soviet formula "Central Asia and Kazakhstan" looks more apt than ever.

Due to its geographical situation Kazakhstan will always make a friend and ally to Russia. Economic, military, political, transport, informational dependency of Kazakhstan on Russia will remain for a long period of time. However, this dependency may tempt Kremlin to use it for the sake of the Russian political agenda. The same is true to some extent for all the Central Asian countries. The quasi-independent politics of Uzbekistan reflects rivalry between Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev for regional leadership, not a pro-Western shift by Tashkent.

When trying to define Central Asia as a region, that is to say a sort of not only geographical but also political, cultural and economic entity, we should regard Russian presence and influence as one of the corner stones of that region.

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2

Chinese Diplomacy in Central Asia: a Critical Assessment

Adil Kaukenov

Chinese diplomacy in Central Asia is determined by China's global foreign policy strategy, its neighboring policy, and its specific interests on the region. With regard to the impact of China's global foreign policy strategy in the Central Asia policy of Beijing, six factors should be underlined:

1. Maintenance of a favorable international situation for domestic development and modernization.
2. Prevention of attempts to restrain the rise of the People's Republic of China.
3. Diversification of China's energy sources.
4. Countering US unilateralism.
5. Extensive use of "soft power" to reassure the international community that economic growth and military modernization of China are not a threat. The promotion of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence is central to this task.
6. Isolate Taiwan in the international arena (to a lesser degree).

The bases of China's neighbouring policy also inspire the Central Asia strategy of China. The key idea of the Chinese diplomacy in relation to its adjacent countries is «good neighborhood and partnership», which includes terms such as «friendliness, safety, and enrichment». The first term, friendliness, refers to developing smooth political relations with all neighboring

sates. Safety implies that China is not regarded as a threat by its neighbors. Finally, enrichment involves that China should contribute to the economic development of its neighbors.

Some specific interests of China in Central Asia are also essential in the configuration of the Chinese diplomacy in the region:

1. The maintenance of stability in the Western provinces of China. Safety issues were the main concern of China in its first interactions with new independent states of Central Asia, since the terrorist activities of Uighur separatist movements reached its peak from 1990 to 1997. At that time most of Chinese interaction with the new republics limited to antiterrorist and counter separatist cooperation. Chinese leaders quickly understood that growing economic bonds with Central Asia could be a valuable opportunity for fostering economic development in Western China and therefore reducing instability in these areas. In the light of recent events in Tibet and Xinjiang this issue is particularly salient.
2. Securing supplies of energy and other strategic natural resources.
3. Breaking US and NATO encirclement. Although China finds useful NATO's fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, Beijing does not approve a long term deployment of NATO troops in Central Asia. China would feel threatened by that presence, especially under scenarios such as a conflict in the Taiwan and outburst of ethnic unrest in Tibet or Xinjiang.
4. Geopolitical domination of Central Asia could advance Chinese influence in the Middle East, Southern Asia, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan.
5. New markets for Chinese products and new access routes to European markets.

Besides these concepts, it is necessary to mention the concrete diplomatic mechanisms employed by China in the Central Asia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is the most important of them by far. SCO allows China to exert influence in Central Asia, mainly in non-traditional

security issues, avoiding concern from the Central Asian Republics and Russia. National safety interests compel China to intensify as much as possible cooperation through SCO in order to achieve enough influence in Central Asia to patronize the general situation in region and to regulate the basic tendencies in the field of security. From the perspective of great powers competition, SCO is also an instrument employed by China to expel the US from the region and to reach parity with Russia. Although China was the initiator of the SCO and tries to keep its status as the main driving force of this organization, Beijing encounters some difficulties to achieve its geostrategic objectives through SCO.

First, Russia is not willing to concede its position of prevalence in Central Asia and regards SCO as a tool for “keeping China disciplined”. Russia secures its military and economic leadership in the region through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Community respectively (EurAsEC). Being the leader of CSTO and EurAsEC and simultaneously member of SCO, the Russian Federation faces a dilemma concerning the future development of SCO: what should SCO concentrate on: economy or security? In case of deepening trade and economic integration, SCO would shadow EurAsEC and China would dominate this organization thanks to its economic might. Russia therefore aspires to create a free trade zone within EurAsEC and to prevent so within the SCO. At the same time, due to Russian military supremacy, Moscow intends to enhance the military dimension of regional cooperation and to subsume SCO military activities into the CSTO, which is based on the Russian military platform (personnel training, weaponry and defense technologies, doctrines, etc.). Along these lines, Russia suggested China to elaborate SCO military design together with CSTO doctrine in the course of preparation of «Peace mission-2007». Beijing rejected that possibility and only agreed on participation of an observer group from CSTO. Moreover, CSTO has proposed the SCO secretary general to join the CSTO coordination body on struggle against drug trafficking to prevent SCO from creating a similar body. Anyway, Russia is afraid that in the long term SCO will absorb

EurAsEC and CSTO, since these organizations suffer from extensive functional and geographical overlapping, with the resulting increase of Chinese influence in Eurasia.

Second, SCO lacks effective mechanisms to react properly in case a crisis breaks out in Central Asia, as events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan already proved. China is trying to change this situation advocating for greater institutionalization of SCO. At the moment the central bodies of SCO are small and disseminated. The permanent staff of the secretary of the SCO located in Beijing consists of only 30 persons, and the Regional Antiterrorist Structure is located in Tashkent. China favors the reinforcement of these institutional capacities and the creating of new operating bodies in the SCO framework to increase its functions, but is defending this position with extreme caution to restraint traditional mistrust in the region against Chinese intervention in their internal affairs. Chinese preoccupation against anti-Chinese feelings in Central Asia, is reflected in the prudent rhetoric of Chinese leaders towards the region. For instance, when Jiang Zemin coined in 2001 the term «Shanghai spirit» to describe the grounding working principles of the organization values, he was referring to mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality in rights, respect of cultural diversity and joint development. The same tune has been played by Hu Jintao with the slogan «harmonious region and mutual prosperity». This Chinese strategy is with the principle of «non-interference», the present decentralized condition of SCO and its rotating presidency. All these three traits are seen by the Central Asian governments as guarantees against great powers interference in their internal affairs and as a significant advantage of dealing with China instead of with other powers.

Third, besides Russia, Central Asian authorities and population are also afraid of economic absorption by China. There is a strong consensus in the region on the impossibility of local industries to compete with Chinese manufactures and with Chinese labor. This explains why China's request for joining EurAsEC was rejected and why Wen Jiabao's proposal for creating a SCO free trade zone was also discarded, although it was agreed to work for establishing a SCO free trade area by 2020. Despite these setbacks China keeps pushing

for economic integration within the SCO to balance Russian primacy in other areas. For example, in 2004 China offered a 900 million US dollars commodity credit to SCO countries, in 2006 the SCO Business Council and the SCO Interbank Association were created, and in 2007 Wen Jiabao insisted at the sixth SCO Prime Ministers' Meeting on improving trade and investment climate on the region and in harmonizing transportation policy among SCO members. To illustrate the moderate success at this regard, it is relevant to keep in mind that the discussion of the projects and the transactions related to the allocation of the above mentioned 900 million US dollars credit has been carried on a bilateral basis, not thorough SCO channels.

Fourth, Chinese interest in developing local infrastructures, particularly, transportation infrastructures, has arisen dual feelings in the region. On the one hand, local governments see this as an opportunity to diversify their foreign relations. On the other hand, they are concerned about increasing their dependency on Beijing. Therefore they have not showed as much interest as it could be expected on these projects. Not to talk about Russian concerns on this process. This explains why some important projects, such as the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline, was agreed at a bilateral level between China and Turkmenistan and between China and the transit countries, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, not in the SCO framework.

Fifth, Russia and the Central Asian Republics oppose Chinese aspirations to substitute CSTO by SCO as the main guarantor of regional stability. China attempts to develop the military dimension of the SCO, particular with regard to non-traditional threats, without involving the CSTO, however, CSTO members are not willing to reduce the role of this organization, since they consider it essential to assure the balance of power in the region and to avoid Chinese domination.

Sixth, Central Asian countries could be unstable partners for China, since their essential interests are not linked to Beijing, and particularly so considering local wariness about Chinese presence in Central Asia and the precedents of sharp foreign policy turns in the recent history of the Central Asian republics.

The economic factor

China is the main economic power in the SCO and is using its growing economic influence in Central Asia to increase also its political role. Trade is the spearhead for Chinese economic penetration in Central Asia. Between 1994 and 2006 the bilateral trade between China and Central Asia grew 30 times to reach 10.8 billion US dollars. This dramatic commercial dynamic has been particularly acute since year 2000, when Beijing launched its “Go West” policy. As a result, trade with China comprised 12.68 percent of Central Asia total foreign trade in 2008, while exchanges with Central Asia only comprised 0.68 percent of China’s total foreign trade for that year. These figures depict an asymmetric relationship, in which Central Asia is much more dependent of China than the other way around. This is particularly the case for those countries which share a border with China. It should be also underlined that the trade volume among the five Central Asian republics and China differs from one country to another. The key place among the Central Asian trading partners of China is confidently occupied by Kazakhstan, whose bilateral trade with China increased by 66 percent in 2007 to reach 13.8 billion US dollars.

TRADE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES, CENTRAL ASIAN SOURCES (2006)

Country	Value of the trade with China (m. US \$)	Share of their trade with China in their total trade (%)	Share of their trade with China in the total trade of China (%)
Kazakhstan	8,784	15.5	0.49
Kyrgyzstan	817	34.5	0.04
Tajikistan	757	10.7	0.02
Uzbekistan	125	5.71	0.05
Turkmenistan	313	1.37	0.007
Total	10,796	12.68	0.607

Source: Defense Academy of the United Kingdom.

Central Asia trade balance with China is negative for the region. In 2006 China exported goods to Central Asia for 7,738 million US dollars, 1.8 times

more than the 4,320 million US dollars that imported. But important differences emerge between those countries rich in hydrocarbons (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) and the rest. This tendency will deepen in the future, since the hydrocarbon producer countries will increase their sales to China probable to the point of achieving a positive trade balance with China.

TRADE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES, CHINESE SOURCES (2006)

Country	Imports from China (m. US \$)	Exports to China (m. US \$)	Mutual commodity turnover (million USD)	Increase in the commodity turnover (%)
Kazakhstan	4,750.5	3,607.3	8,357.8	22.8
Kyrgyzstan	2,112.8	112.9	2,225.7	128.9
Uzbekistan	406.2	565.9	972.1	42.8
Tajikistan	305.8	18	323.8	105
Turkmenistan	162.6	16	178.6	62.4
Total	7,737.9	4,320.1	12,058	

Source: Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China.

With regard to the structure of the trade between Central Asia and China, in essence, China exports finished products to Central Asia and imports raw material from the region. In 2006 finished products (machinery and equipment, foodstuffs and consumer goods) made 92% of total Chinese exports to the region, whereas raw materials (hydrocarbons, ferrous and nonferrous metals, chemical raw materials, and textile raw material) comprised 90.2% of Chinese imports from Central Asia. This tendency is becoming more acute in the last years as it can be seen in the data on Sino-Kazakh trade. This situation is worrisome for the Central Asian economics in the long term, since puts pressure on the local industries and condemns the region to focus on low value-added activities.

MAIN CHINESE EXPORTS TO KAZAKHSTAN (2006)

Description of goods	Million USD	Annual increase or reduction (%)
Hosiery	938.2	45.6
Footwear	520.5	-25.1
Energy and technological equipment	437.8	39.7
Furniture	397.1	55.6
Clothing (besides knitted)	337.7	44.3
Plastic and plastic products	288	21.6
Electrical machines and equipment	211.7	32.6
Automobiles and tractors	207.4	83.5

Source: Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China.

IMPORT FROM KAZAKHSTAN TO PRC ON THE BASIC COMMODITY ITEMS (2006)

Description of goods	Million USD	Annual increase or reduction (%)
Mineral fuel, oil, oil products	1,339.7	126.9
Zinc and zinc products	617.3	113.5
Copper and copper products	491.2	-20.8
Ferrous materials	433.7	-52.5
Ores, slags and ashes	359.8	58.1
Inorganic chemistry products	205.5	68.5

Source: Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China.

Most of the Chinese trade with Central Asia, over 80 percent, comes from Xinjiang into the region. The remoteness of Central Asia and Western China from sea communications complicates their access to the main world trade routes and makes Central Asia an ideal vector for the external economic activity of the manufacturers of Western China. The Chinese leaders are encouraging this economic interaction and therefore they will probably keep growing in the future. In 2007 the State Council released a document on the social and economic development of Xinjiang, which emphasizes the aperture of Xinjiang towards Central Asia and identifies this Chinese region as a platform for processing manufactures to be exported into and through

Central Asia and as the destination of an energy corridor from Central Asia. To develop this strategy some investments are scheduled for the next 5 years, such as 280 million US dollars to improving land routes between China and Central Asia.

China is not only an emergent trading partner for Central Asia, but also a prominent investor. For example, in 2005 China invested 1.8 billion US dollars in Kazakhstan, which received a total of 6.4 billion US dollars in foreign direct investment that year. Besides, China allocates soft loans to the Central Asian countries to develop their transport and communication infrastructures, their extractive sector, their hydropower capacity, and so on. It is necessary to note that those financial and economic resources are given on favorable terms with the condition of using Chinese techniques and equipment. Some projects financed under this scheme are the Hydrostation-2 in Andijan, the Lolazor-Hulton electric line in Tajikistan, and the Moinak hydroelectric plant in Kazakhstan.

The energy factor

Examining the interests of China in Central Asia, it is impossible to disregard the energy factor. China is the second biggest world consumer and importer of oil after the US. In 2006 the output and the consumption of oil in China reached 183.7 and 370 million tons respectively. The gap between Chinese oil production and consumption will keep increasing to reach a volume from 250 to 300 million tons per year between 2015 and 2020.

Taking into account this scenario, China is diversifying its energy suppliers, its sources of energy, and its energy transportation routes to guarantee its energy security. This task is particularly pressing, since some of the main traditional providers of China are located in politically unstable regions such as the Middle East (50% of Chinese total oil imports) and most of Chinese oil imports pass through the Malacca Strait (around 80%).

The bottleneck of the Strait of Malacca causes grave concern among the Chinese leaders, who correctly assume that in case of conflict with Washington, this sea pass will be blocked by the US fleet.

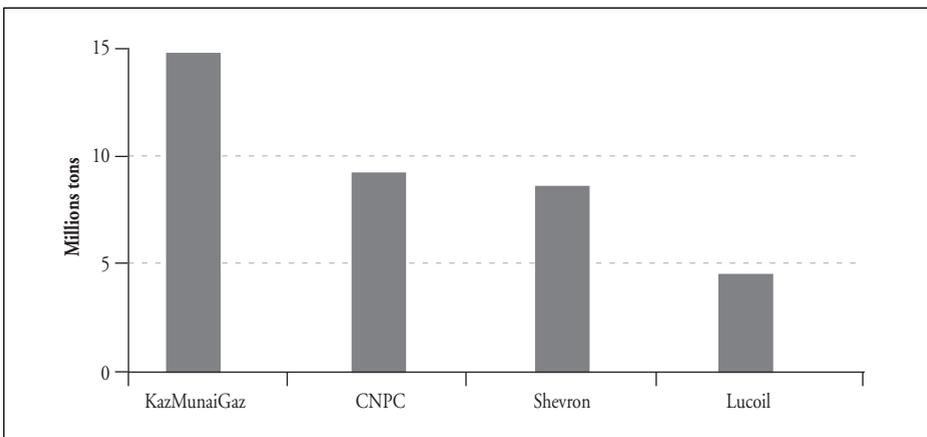
All those factors have pushed Beijing to pursue more active energy cooperation with Central Asia, since energy transportation from these countries is relatively safe, short, and is channeled through ground-based pipelines. Moreover, limited US military presence makes Central Asia an attractive energy supplier in the eyes of Chinese strategists. In addition, China will have the possibility to enlarge the oil and gas pipelines coming from Central Asia to consolidate its position in the Caspian region and to reach Northern Iran and over the long term deeper into the Middle East.

So far, Kazakhstan is the main energy partner of China in Central Asia. In 2007 China imported almost 6 million tons of oil from Kazakhstan (3.68% of Chinese total oil imports). This figure entails a 123.5 percent increase from the previous year and turn Kazakhstan into the seventh biggest oil provider of China. The proved oil reserves of Kazakhstan rank eight in the world with 5.5 billion tons and its production prospects will reach 130 million tons per year in 2015 from 66 million tons in 2006. Therefore there is still a huge margin for increasing Kazakh oil exports to China in the medium term.

In recent years China has substantially strengthened its position in the energy sector of Kazakhstan. Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) controls 14.4% of the oil production in Kazakhstan (9.3 million tons). CNPC is the second most important oil company operating in Kazakhstan according to the size of its controlled oil production in this country. If the share of the CITIC Group in the Karazhanbasmunay is also considered, the oil production share controlled by Chinese companies in Kazakhstan increases to 10.5 million tons or 16.2 percent of Kazakhstani annual output. This mounting role of Chinese oil companies has raised concern among some Kazakhstani politicians, who have vented their fears in the parliament. However, until 2007 only a small portion of the oil exploited by Chinese companies in Kazakhstan was sold to the Chinese markets. Any-

way, three factors signal that more and more Kazakhstani oil is going to be sold to China in the following years: descending supply obligations of CNPC to non-Chinese interests, the construction of new pipelines, and agreements sealed with Russian companies to send oil to China.

SHARE OF KAZAKHSTAN'S OIL PRODUCTION BY COMPANIES



Source: Expert Online.

VOLUME OF OIL PRODUCTION IN KAZAKHSTAN CONTROLLED BY CNPC IN 2006

Producing company	CNPC share, %	Production, thousand tons	Production controlled by CNPC, thousand tons
CNPC-Aktobemunaigaz	60.3	5,704.9	3,440.1
«Petro Kazakhstan Kumkol Resources»	67	3,720.9	2,493
«Turgai petroleum»	33.5	3,380.2	1,132.4
«KazGerMunai»	33.5	2,874.8	963.1
«Buzacci Operating»	50	1,299.1	649.6
CNPC Ai-Dan Munai	100	451.2	451.2
«KuatAmlonMunai»	50	417.5	208.8
Total		17,848.6	9,338

Source: Expert Online.

China also manifests interest in the gas reserves of Central Asia. In 2006 the proved natural gas reserves of Central Asia mounted to 7.7 trillion cubic meters (Kazakhstan, 3 trillion; Uzbekistan, 1.87 trillion; Turkmenistan, 2.86 trillion cubic meters). Although so far China satisfies its natural gas demand with its domestic production, in 2006 China obtained 58.6 billion cubic meters of natural gas and consumed 58 billion, Beijing is on the verge of becoming a net importer of natural gas. According to official Chinese estimations, China will import around 20 billion cubic meters of natural gas in 2010 and 90 billion in 2020.

Significant expansion in Chinese natural gas consumption will be sustained by the state promoted increase in the share of natural gas in its domestic energy consumption structure. This is one of the measures proposed in the new energy policy of China, which aims to reduce the environmental impact of economic development. At the moment, natural gas only satisfies 3 percent of China's energy demand, but this share will increase to 10 percent by 2020. To satisfy this demand, mainly for Northern and Central China provinces, Beijing has signed some supply contracts with Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, 30 billion cubic meters each beginning in 2009) and with Russia (30-40 billion cubic meters beginning in 2011). Anyway, it should be kept in mind that exploitation contracts granted to Chinese companies in Central Asia are marginal.

In August 2007 started the construction of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China through the territory of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to convey those Central Asian natural gas imports into China. The 1.3 trillion cubic meters reserves of Bagtyyarlyk, on the right bank of the Amu Darya, will be resource base of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline. These resources will be exploited by a Sino-Turkmen joint venture, being this the first case in Turkmenistan of a foreign operator allowed to exploit inland gas reserves. The building of this gas pipeline is not only in China's interest, but also in the interest of Central Asia countries. This new route for Central Asian gas exports will decrease local dependence on Russian transit routes

and gives leverage to the Central Asian countries in their negotiations with Moscow on gas prices. In addition, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan will obtain some benefits from the transit gas to China. With regard to Kazakhstan, Astana will also take advantage of the Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline to ensure gas supply to Southern Kazakhstan.

Despite of the above mentioned factors, the economic viability of these gas transportation routes linking Central Asia and China remains dubious. On the demand side, different international sources alert that official Chinese estimations on domestic gas consumption not only are wildly overstated, but also could be covered resorting exclusively to liquefied natural gas. On the supply side, serious doubts have been casted on Central Asian countries capacity to sell gas to China in the agreed quantities, since they have substantial previous supply agreements with Russia and there is no guarantee that they can increase their production capacity at the required pace. Not to talk about discrepancies on how to calculate the gas price that China want to tie with the lower coal prices.

Transit potential of Central Asia

Central Asia is important for Beijing not only because of its hydrocarbon resources, but also because, in the future, it can ensure land access into Iran, and further into Europe for China. Major railway lines will become the main channel of land communication throughout Central Asia. The Trans-Asian Railroad (TAR) is the most important of the railway lines under discussion. TAR would connect the Pacific Ocean Ports of China (Lianyungang, Qingdao, Tianjin) with Turkey. The total length of this transcontinental railway will be 10,500 km. In the Chinese territory the main stops of this route will be Lianyungang, Xian, Lanzhou, Urumchi, and Alashankou, where it will be connected to the Kazakh railroad network. From Kazakhstan the route will go through Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Turkey, and South Europe.

The creation of this land route will allow China to increase the competitiveness of its products, due to the reduction its delivery time. The length of the China – Europe land route is almost 2 times shorter than the sea route (20,400 km). Goods exported through the railway line would arrive to Europe in 11-12 days. This sharp reduction in the delivery time vis-à-vis the sea route can compensate the higher delivery costs of the land route. Besides, the development of the TAR will allow China to reduce its dependence on Russian railway lines for goods transportation to Europe. In addition, the successful realization of this project will allow China to make substantial economic benefit from the transit of goods to Europe from Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia, since one-third of the TAR (4,131 km.) will pass through Chinese territory. TAR therefore would turn China into a major link in the land transportation between Asian and Europe. Additional argument for constructing the TAR is the stimulus it could provide for the integration of Western China into international communication networks and for the economic development of this region. TAR is not the only railway route that could be open to connect China with Central Asia and beyond. The China-Kirgizstan railway line would connect Kashgar with Andijan, crossing the Torugart Pass and Kirgizstan, opening more options for Chinese shippers.

Besides, railway lines, highways are being also constructed to link China with Central Asia, due to the comparative flexibility and speed of this way of transportation. In 2004 the Trans-China Highway was finished from Lianyungan port up to Khorgos, in the Sino-Kazakh border. In addition, the 260 km Kashgar-Irkeshtam highway has been constructed to connect Kashgar with the Andijan - Osh - Irkeshtam road.

Despite the undeniable advantage of road and railway transportation, the full-scale realization of a railway and a road corridor linking China to Central Asia and the Western side of Eurasia is restrained by three factors. First, the scarcity and low quality of the existing roads and railway lines, plus the rough orography of the area, demand substantial investments for the materialization of the project. Second, besides infrastructural problems, adminis-

trative and bureaucratic barriers, such as different tariffs, different customs regulations, slow customs and boundary controls, also hinder this venture. Finally, the geopolitical context must be also considered, since the land exit to Turkey and further into Europe is provided by Iran, where the political situation is extremely instable.

To untapped the huge potential of transport and communication cooperation between China and Central Asia, Beijing should take a decisive role in the finance and construction of the required infrastructures, plus increasing its diplomatic activity to persuade the involved countries to harmonize their transport and customs policies and procedures.

Conclusion

China is competing for strategic dominance in Central Asia and is resorting mainly to its economic might and to soft power to fulfill this aim. Besides, Russian concerns on Chinese growing influence in the regions, the Central Asia countries hold diverse attitudes towards this process, which they regard as both a risk and an opportunity. Kazakhstan is the Central Asian country which maintains the most intense relationship with China. Despite the smooth relationship between Astana and Beijing there are some concerns on the Kazakh side, such as the management of the Ili river, the flooding of Chinese products, the concentration of Chinese investment in the hydrocarbons sector, and Chinese immigration. The situation in Kirgizstan is quite similar, but for Chinese development cooperation, which is sincerely appreciated by Bishkek. Although Tajikistan also shares a border with China and the bilateral relationship is quickly taking off, this relationship is so far much less intense than those maintained between Astana and Bishkek with Beijing. Uzbekistan keeps the smoother political relationship of all Central Asian countries with China, since the climate of good political understanding between Tashkent and Beijing is not disturbed neither by economic nor by geostrategic issues. Like, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan also

maintain a scarce relation with China, although Beijing and Ashgabat have signed gas deals which will assure the supply of 30 billion cubic meters of gas to China annually for a period of 30 years. Although Chinese interests in the Turkmen oil sector will impulse the bilateral relationship in the short term, the future of this relationship could be endangered if Ashgabat is not able to honor the substantial supply agreements that has signed with Russia and China.

The SCO reflects these contradictions and behaves at the same time as an instrument for Chinese penetration into Central Asia and as a retraining mechanism of that penetration in favor of Russia and the autonomy of the Central Asian republics.

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3

The US Geopolitical Experience in Central Asia: Success or Failure?

Murat Laumulin

It goes without saying that American geopolitics and geostrategy are of a genuinely global nature and affect practically every region and every country. And Central Asia is no exception in this respect. America's influence there is of a multi-factorial and multi-level nature in every aspect - the political, military-strategic, economic, and ideological. From the very first days of independence, the Central Asian countries have been aware of America's influence (and pressure) in essentially every sphere.

In Central Asia, America is confronted with other world centers of power (Russia, China, the EU, Iran, and other Islamic states), which explains the fairly frequent contradictions. American policy in Central Asia depends to a certain extent on Washington's relations with these states, but it is not determined by them. On the whole, Central Asia's policy is part of the U.S.'s broader Eurasian strategy, which covers the Caspian, the Caucasus, Russia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Asia, and China.

It should also be said that America's Eurasian policy is part of Washington's much broader global strategy designed to perpetuate America's domination in the world economic and financial system and its military-strategic superiority. America is seeking greater geopolitical influence (in Eurasia among other places) and containment of potential rivals (China, the EU,

and Russia), as well as struggling against so-called international terrorism (for control over the Islamic world).

Central Asia is an important, but not the only, element of the U. S.'s global strategy. At the same time, it is critically important for the U. S.'s Eurasian geopolitics to establish control over Eurasia. For this reason, Central Asia's role and importance for Washington will become even greater.

America's foreign policy is full of contradictions: its rational and well-balanced elements are combined with ideological approaches; presumptuous and even aggressive actions irritate the allies and provide the enemies with the chance to accuse the United States of Great Power arrogance and a unilateral approach to the world. This stems from the split in the American political establishment, which cannot be described as a group of like-minded people. Ideally, the administration should act as a closely-knit political and ideological team. The split in America's strategic community (and society) over the country's foreign policy affects U.S. conduct on the international arena to a certain extent.

This contradiction has an institutional aspect as well: together with the State Department and the National Security Council, the structures directly responsible for America's foreign policy, the Congress, the media, and public opinion (through the lobbying system and NGOs) largely shape U.S. conduct abroad. In addition, from 2001, the Department of Defense acquired much more weight in foreign policy decision-making. This is only natural since the country has been de facto in a state of war since the end of 2001.

The Evolution of American Strategy in Central Asia

Washington's Central Asian policy can be divided into several stages. At the initial stage (1991-1996), it was guided by several factors: first, the U.S. unofficially accepted Russia's geopolitical responsibility for the region and its interests; second, Washington was more concerned over the future of the Soviet nuclear potential deployed in Kazakhstan; third, America was uneasy

about the potentially stronger position of Islamism, since Iran was one of the closest neighbors.

At the second stage (1996-2001), American strategy acquired new priorities: the Caspian's hydrocarbon reserves; and the pipeline later known as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which bypassed Russia and Iran. In 1997, Central Asia and the Caspian were declared a zone of «U.S. vital interests» and were included in the sphere of responsibility of the U.S. CENTCOM. These changes were molded into the so-called Talbott Doctrine. The United States made it clear that it was not seeking monopolist strategic domination in the region, but demonstrated that it would not tolerate the attempts of other great powers to seek such domination. At this stage, Washington was no longer concerned about taking Russia's interests into account.

It was at this point that America revised its attitude to Turkey's and China's role in the region, which was previously considered a positive factor that might bridle Moscow (at least theoretically). It looked as if Washington had decided to unilaterally shoulder responsibility for the region. At that stage, the United States was actively promoting the BTC pipeline, as its key geopolitical project, to move Caspian energy reserves bypassing Russia and Iran. By the end of the 20th century, America began demonstrating a growing concern over the threat to the Central Asian countries posed by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The 9/11 drama ushered in the third stage (2001-2005). The United States plunged into a wide-scale struggle against international terrorism represented by the militant Islamic radicals; it launched a military operation in Afghanistan and deployed its military bases in some of the Central Asian republics to carry out the counterterrorist campaign. It should be said that from the very start, George W. Bush's Republican Administration practiced new approaches to Central Asia, which became part and parcel of the general counterterrorist struggle in the wake of the stormy events of 2001.

In fact, the U.S.'s new Central Asian strategy became part of the National Security Strategy formulated at approximately the same time. The United States discovered that the region was indispensable with respect to its

united antiterrorist front and energy security. It was at this stage that the United States tried to formulate its Eurasian strategy, which presupposed drawing closer to Russia and India for strategic purposes, more consistent relations with China, using Eurasian hydrocarbon reserves (of Siberia, the Caspian, and Central Asia) as an alternative to OPEC, enlarging NATO further to the East, and changing the nature of America's relations with its West European allies. This strategy inevitably affected Central Asia.

At that stage the U. S. first consolidated its military-strategic presence in the region and set about expanding it together with NATO. Washington stepped up its military-political cooperation with the Central Asian countries. It built up its pressure on the local states within the «support of democracy» strategy; its biting criticism of the human rights violations by some of the Central Asian regimes could not but have a negative effect on the nature of the relations between the local states and the U.S. Washington was very vexed by the more active involvement of the other interested powers (Russia and China), which tried on a bilateral basis and within multilateral cooperation in the form of the SCO to limit America's influence in the region.

The concern of the Central Asian governments as well as of Moscow and Beijing over the results of America's involvement mounted along with the wave of so-called Color Revolutions that swept the CIS in 2003-2005, which the United States peremptorily supported. The events in Kyrgyzstan, which removed President Akaev, and Uzbekistan, which had to quench the riot in Andijan in the spring of 2005, produced a negative response to the American strategy both in the local countries and in their «elder» SCO partners. In the summer of 2005, the SCO unanimously demanded that the United States specify the deadlines for withdrawing its military bases from the region. In the fall of the same year, the United States began its withdrawal from Uzbekistan.

Since 2005, the U.S.'s strategic circles have been discussing a new geopolitical project for a Greater Central Asia under America's aegis. Washington intends to tie Central Asia and Afghanistan and possibly other neighboring regions into a single military-strategic and geopolitical whole.

The United States is putting its new strategic approaches into practice, including with respect to Greater Central Asia. The novelty was part of Washington's strategy of global readjustment to the vast geopolitical Eurasian expanses, of which the Greater Middle East was a part. By 2006, American strategy and policy in Central Asia entered a new, fourth stage.

So far, America's future strategy has not acquired a clear form. It looks as if it will include the following elements: creation of Greater Central Asia to incorporate the region into America's strategic designs in Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East; revival of the «containment» policy in relation to Russia (and probably China) in Central Asia; much more intensive confrontation with Iran; more active American involvement in the Caspian; NATO's greater role in Central Asia, etc.

The strategy was launched at a time when the region was living through serious geostrategic and political changes. The events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the spring of 2005 revealed that the Color Revolution strategies carried out in Central Asia had their limits. It became absolutely clear that it was dangerous from the military-political and geopolitical viewpoint to artificially accelerate the regime change process using the methods that had proven relatively successful in Georgia and Ukraine.

America's relations with Uzbekistan took a drastic turn for the worse; the process that began in 2004 was brought to its peak by the Andijan events of May 2005. By evacuating the base in Khanabad America cut down its military presence in the region. At the Astana summit in early July 2005, the SCO members unanimously demanded that the U.S. and NATO make it clear how long they intended to remain in Central Asia. This was a serious geopolitical challenge engineered by Beijing and Tashkent in particular.

The United States preserved its military presence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is obviously resolved to fortify its presence in the so-called Greater Central Asian region. The new American strategy is designed to change the situation in its favor under the rapidly changing military-strategic and geopolitical conditions.

Methods and Tools of America's Central Asian Policy

At the early stage, Washington was guided by two priorities and several issues of lesser importance when dealing with the newly independent Central Asian states. The United States recognized the five new Central Asian states immediately after the Soviet Union ceased to exist and established diplomatic relations with them. In 1992, the Congress passed the Freedom Support Act, under which American legislation was adjusted to the new geopolitical reality, in which there were fifteen newly independent states. The act helped to develop open markets, democracy, and civil society; it set up mechanisms conducive to trade, economic cooperation, and contacts in the sphere of education and ensured financial support of non-proliferation of weapons and demilitarization. The law was intended to strengthen the U.S.'s national security by preventing the restoration of communism and the emergence of religious extremism in Central Asia.

In July 1997, speaking at the Johns Hopkins University, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott described the U.S.'s foreign policy aims in Central Asia. He pointed out that successful economic and political reforms would promote stability and meet the interests not only of the regional states, but also of all the countries outside the region. Failure would encourage terror and religious and political extremism; more than that - it might end in war. He also pointed out that his country was very much interested in gaining access to the local oil reserves.

The United States was definitely determined to prevent a repeat of the 19th-century Big Game, in which the smaller countries would have been used as small change in the battle for energy resources initiated by Russia or any other country driven by neo-imperialist ambitions. In March 1999, when speaking at the Congress, Stephen Sestanovich, Ambassador-at-Large to the states of the former Soviet Union, confirmed the United States' continued adherence to these principles. He also pointed out that despite the rather shaky advance toward certain aims (such as democratic and economic reforms), Washington was determined to develop its relations with the Central Asian states.

The George W. Bush Administration that came to power in 2001 was very critical of the foreign policy course of its Democrat predecessor and formulated its own, typically Republican, priorities. However, prior to 9/11, the administration was not very concerned with the potential threat of Islamist terrorism; the “arc of instability”, with Central Asia as its core, was not a top priority either. In Central Asia, America merely followed the course charted by the previous administration. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush criticized those who said that the United States might have helped other countries develop their national and state structures and that it should have kept a lower profile on the international scene.

In Central Asia, Washington could effectively use two tools of political pressure: (1) the local regimes could be accused of human rights violations, criticized as authoritarian, accused of corruption, and urged to become more democratic; (2) financial economic, military, technical, and humanitarian aid could be cut down. During the election campaign, America’s Central Asian policy became part of the domestic political struggle between the Republicans and the Democrats, which acquired even more vehemence as the 2004 presidential election drew closer.

Early in 2003, the American legislature was presented with bills that offered much harsher wording than before. They expressed “Congress’ opinion”, which meant that they were not binding. These documents spoke of the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as “dictatorships and tyrannies”. Early in 2004, President George W. Bush announced that the budget of the National Endowment for Democracy would be doubled to pay for even stronger interference in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern and post-Soviet countries. The NGOs are openly integrated into Washington’s general strategy aimed at America’s global domination.

In 2005, at the beginning of its second term, the administration announced that it would carry out another “charge for democracy”. On 18 May, 2005, when talking at a congress of the International Republican Institute (IRI), the U.S. president made no secret of his country’s intention to acti-

vely encourage the Color Revolutions that, he asserted, would take place in the future. In August 2005, the United States announced that it had opened «democratic information centers» and that it was engaged in projects designed to keep independent media afloat in Kazakhstan and five independent radio stations in Tajikistan.

During 2004 and 2005, the situation in the CIS was developing under the strong impact of the events in Georgia, Ukraine, and partly Moldova, in the course of which the local regimes were replaced with pro-Western cabinets, while the new rulers demonstrated a strong desire to export Color Revolutions to other CIS regions. They did their best to support the opposition in some of the CIS members; the West, in turn, extended its direct political support to the opposition in Kazakhstan and Russia in particular. The revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the events that followed it played a special role in America's Central Asian policy. At first the West and its epigones across the post-Soviet expanse hailed the regime change; the mounting political crisis in Kyrgyzstan, which caused destabilization, reduced to naught the efforts of the country's leaders to maintain any semblance of order, and the resultant political chaos forced the West to revise its regime change strategy in the CIS. It was obvious that the scripts written for the CIS European members were ill-suited to Central Asia. What was more, they were fraught with grave destabilization of individual countries and the region's geopolitical situation. Under these conditions, the West once more became aware of Russia's stabilizing role as a regional factor of great importance and was forced to take it into account.

By 2005, Washington's regime changing strategy hit stalemate; America shifted its interests, either deliberately or due to the circumstances, to Kazakhstan. While the 2004 parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan were accompanied by the «change of the elite» scenario actively promoted by NGOs and funds of all sorts living on Western money, the presidential campaign of 2005 was unfolding in a very different context: the tactics and methods of interference had been readjusted. Two factors were responsible for this:

- (1) Apprehension of excessive destabilization as the result of a regime change (this had already happened in Kyrgyzstan) and
- (2) Russia's possible interference or its vehement response.

Throughout 2004 and 2005, the threat of a U.S. initiated Color Revolution in Kazakhstan remained real. In his report of 18 May, 2005, the U.S. president predicted inevitable changes in Central Asia. When talking about the region, he never mentioned Uzbekistan, which suggested that Kazakhstan had been selected for "democratization". Together with "Kazakhgate" - type maneuvers, the Americans badly needed more tools to put pressure on Astana to protect themselves from any actions that might damage U.S. interests in the region.

The threat of another Color Revolution was averted by Astana's unambiguous response to the events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, a well oiled mechanism of consultations with Moscow and Beijing, the delayed decision about the presidential election, as well as the unanimous position of the SCO members at the SCO summit in July 2005. As the date of the presidential election in Kazakhstan drew nearer, the danger of Washington's interference did not abate. The events of the end of the summer of 2005 confirmed that certain political forces of the United States had not abandoned their plans to stage a Color Revolution. The situation in Kazakhstan changed radically in the summer and fall of 2005.

America's Changed Strategy in Central Asia

The tactics and strategy of America's Central Asian policy changed and acquired certain new elements. American experts suggested that US policy in Central Asia should be restructured together with US public diplomacy because of the mounting anti-American sentiments. The trend toward a reassessment of America's policy and much more desired military strategic cooperation with Tashkent was further consolidated by a series of terrorist acts in April and July 2004.

It was recommended that Washington increase pressure behind the scene on its Central Asian partners to promote political and economic changes. In the process, it should be guided by two geopolitical imperatives. First, it should go on detaching Central Asia from the Caucasus in the geopolitical context. American experts were convinced that the region was typologically closer to the Middle East and Southeastern Asia, while the Caucasus was much closer to Europe.

American analysts pointed out that Washington would get bad headaches if the Islamists acting in Central Asia grew more radical and more belligerent: if forced to deal with shady regimes for the sake of its continued military presence, America would run the risk of tarnishing its image as a liberal and benevolent force. If the United States, they argued, became resolved to wage the «battle of ideas» on all fronts, it would need a much more coordinated and public diplomatic campaign to achieve positive results. It was recommended that Central Asia be included in the public statements on the need to observe democracy in the Muslim world.

Second, the United States was working toward developing a nationally oriented civil society in the Central Asian republics. Most of the expert community was convinced that the United States should support the idea of human rights and other aspects to which public opinion was especially sensitive. After a while, this would create a foundation for political movements able to act as a functional opposition to the ruling regimes, which was especially important in such states as Uzbekistan.

To put pressure on it, American analysts suggested that the U.S.'s military presence in the region should be diversified to make American policy there more flexible operationally and diplomatically. In this context, Kazakhstan was regarded as an alternative partner because of its highly promising economic and political potential.

Prior to the terrorist acts of 2004 in Uzbekistan, Washington planned to put pressure on Tashkent to force it onto the road of liberalization. If the Uzbek side refused to cooperate, the U.S. should be ready to re-deploy its military from Khanabad and Karshi to Kazakhstan or other Central Asian

bases. The events allowed Islam Karimov to go on with the old policy or even to intensify it. The West, in turn, increased its pressure.

The United States could safely ignore the interests of Russia and China in the region as long as they did not counter the global antiterrorist struggle. The airbase in Kant (within the CSTO framework) and the SCO anti-terrorist center in Tashkent did not add tension to the relations between Washington, on the one hand, and Moscow and Beijing, on the other, merely because the American side never looked at them as threatening to its interests. Moreover, NATO may even conduct joint military exercises with Russian troops in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the SCO antiterrorist center in Tashkent might become a starting point for cooperation between the United States and the SCO.

America's strategy in Central Asia is determined, first and foremost, by geopolitical factors. This is the main thing about it. The United States has concentrated on its broader military-political contacts with the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states. This is the main aim of cooperation between America and these two regions. Washington obviously has no intention of encouraging agrarian reform and high technologies; it demonstrated no intention of increasing its humanitarian aid.

American analysts believed that the White House was not always aware that some of the Central Asian republics were unable to resolve their economic, political, and social problems, mainly because their democratic institutions were completely impotent and there was no elementary political culture indispensable to every contemporary state. If Washington insists on the present course, NATO, under U.S. leadership, will turn into the «region's gendarme» with a leading position in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia; this will allow America to outline the limits of Russia's influence in the region.

Washington has often indulged in headstrong policies that bordered on bluffing. In 2001, American politicians acquired the habit of making thunderous statements designed to convince Russia, Iran, China, and the Central Asian countries that the United States intends to keep its military in the

region for a long time to come. As a result, these countries could not demand that the U.S. withdraw from the region in 2002 when the counter-terrorist operation in Afghanistan was over.

The American expert community believes that what they call “bureaucratic pluralism”, or rather rivalry between the State Department and the Pentagon is the weakest point in America’s policy in Central Asia. The State Department insists that today, when the Central Asian republics have found themselves on the frontline of the antiterrorist struggle, it is critically important to promote ideas of human rights and democracy. To achieve this, the State Department is pouring money into the independent media and journalism; it is helping to develop political parties, strengthen the freedom of religious convictions and the rule of law, and carry out local government reform and reform of the health system. Its annual reports habitually criticize all the Central Asian countries for their human rights violations.

The Department of Defense, in turn, concentrated on the security-related advantages created by cooperation with the region’s states. In February 2004, when paying visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld did his best to play down the criticism hurled at the Karimov regime for human rights violations. America’s interests in Central Asia are connected with the defense secretary’s plans to modernize the American army and redistribute the American military bases on a global scale: they should be placed closer to the potential seats of conflict.

In 2005, the State Department, with Congress behind it, finally predominated: since that time on Tashkent’s domestic policy has been criticized. On the other hand, the Department of Defense prevailed in its pragmatic approach to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan demonstrated late in July 2005 during Donald Rumsfeld’s visit to the region.

In 2006, Washington shifted its accents. The official assessments of the situation in Central Asia changed. They were formulated by Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried at a Hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia. On 27 October, 2005, he said that America’s strategy in

Central Asia presupposed balanced regional cooperation in security, energy, and regional economic cooperation, as well as freedom through reforms. He noted that “Kazakhstan does have the potential to merge as a regional model” and described Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan “as possible emerging reformers”, while Turkmenistan “remains unfortunately an autocratic state... We are nevertheless pursuing a policy of engagement with the government, seeking cooperation where we can, and where there are clear benefits to our interests”, he said. In Uzbekistan, “the United States will continue to speak privately and publicly about our concerns”, he added.

Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs E. Anthony Wayne was much more specific when addressing the American Chamber of Commerce at approximately the same time: “As Kazakhstan’s economy continues to develop», said he, «it will be an engine for growth within Central Asia”. When talking about State Secretary Rice’s recent visit to Central Asia, American analysts agreed that it was intended to specify America’s interests in the region and to demonstrate them to the local ruling elites. America wanted Moscow to act in a similar way: to outline its interests, to coordinate them with those who rule the Central Asian countries, and to harmonize them, openly and unambiguously, with America’s interests in the region.

When on a visit to Astana in mid-October 2005, Henry Kissinger made more or less similar statements. He said that Kazakhstan, as a country at the crossroads of the largest civilizations, played an important role in the region and the world. In fact, in 2005, the U. S. had to decide whether to fan another Orange Revolution or to follow the *laissez faire* principle. Washington opted for the latter.

The National Committee for American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), a public organization of several influential businessmen and politicians concerned with America’s image abroad and the country’s genuine national interests all over the world, has good contacts in the cabinet and the strategic establishment. In 2005, it made its contribution to the changed position of the White House with respect to Kazakhstan.

In the spring of 2005, it dispatched a sort of mini think-tank to Kazakhstan; eyewitness accounts, meetings, and consultations enabled NCAFP members to draw up an analytical paper that offered a balanced and objective assessment of the situation. The document left no chances for the opposition, while the White House was asked to support the current state of affairs in politics. The committee sent the paper to the U. S. State Department and probably played an important role in Washington's assessment of the situation in Kazakhstan on the eve of the presidential election and the prospect of a Color Revolution. In 2006, the NCAFP confirmed its recommendations.

In 2005, the American strategic circles presented a new geopolitical project: a so-called Greater Central Asia created with Washington's help. It presupposed that Central Asia and Afghanistan might be united into a military-strategic and geopolitical whole later connected to the so-called Greater Middle East controlled by the West (paper by the American Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus dated March 2005).

It was intended to detach the extended region from the monopoly influence of the other great powers (Russia and China), to protect Afghanistan against the destabilizing influence of its neighbors (Pakistan and Iran), and to attach it to a much more stable and West-oriented Central Asia.

The new strategy was also expected to alleviate the fears that the Central Asian states might start thinking of American policy as a sporadic rather than systematic phenomenon. In other words, the local leaders might start doubting the United States' opportunity and resolution to insist on its regional presence in the face of Moscow and Beijing.

On the whole, the Greater Central Asian project completed and extended the earlier geopolitical project designed to set up a Greater Middle East and was supposed to pursue the same strategic aims, namely, diversification of strategic interests and stability in the region under American domination.

Under this plan, Washington should maintain an illusion of «geopolitical pluralism» to keep Russia and China happy by letting them indulge in self-importance. Together with the West, they should have been granted the status of the guarantors and donors of the modernization process. The Ame-

rican strategists, however, would have been much happier if the Russian Federation and China remained “benevolent observers”, which means that they should be removed from the active geopolitical game. It was suggested that for the same purpose India and Turkey should be invited as unofficial guarantors.

The Andijan events and the radical changes in Tashkent’s foreign policy endangered the part of the project related to Uzbekistan. Initially the country was intended as an integration engine for Greater Central Asia through agreements with Pakistan, building a railway to Afghanistan in cooperation with Japan, creating a transport corridor to the Indian Ocean, and forming a free trade zone in the Ferghana Valley, in which other Central Asian countries were expected to be involved.

The economic section of the Greater Central Asian project presupposed that the local states would be incorporated as promptly as possible into the world financial and economic structures in which the West dominated; the region was expected to gain access to trade and transport routes to become an important center of international transportation of raw materials and commodities under American control. The agrarian sector was to be treated as a priority compared to industrial growth; agrarian policy was to be used to fight drug trafficking (here Kazakhstan’s experience infighting drug money laundering could be used, at least in part).

The project outlines several organizational-technical and diplomatic means to successfully implement America’s strategy aimed at boosting the roles of the Pentagon and the State Department to make America’s presence in the region even more effective. It was deemed necessary to increase NATO’s role and importance as one of the key instruments of Washington’s strategy. There were plans to set up a Greater Central Asian Council to allow the United States to coordinate regional policy on a permanent basis and even shape it; annual visits by the U.S. State Secretary to the Central Asian countries were intended as a regular feature of America’s policy.

In 2005-2006, the U.S.’s policy in Central Asia entered a new stage. In the short-term perspective, the Greater Central Asian project looked like a

folly. It was too difficult to implement in the conditions emerging at that time and in view of America's headaches in other parts of the world. In the mid-term perspective, however, we can expect that the present administration (or the one that replaces it) will arm itself with the project. After all, it contains all of America's main priorities and foreign policy aims, as well as the mechanisms needed to succeed.

Despite the cooling off, the American strategic community (the National Defense University under the U.S. Department of Defense and the National War College) warned that Washington made a grave mistake by withdrawing its military bases from Uzbekistan and stepping up its criticism of the Karimov regime, which had proven its viability and determination to use force to squelch the opposition. On the other hand, experts added that the threats to the regime were real and not an invention of the regime's propaganda machine. This group of experts, which worked for the Pentagon, suggested that America should pay more attention to Kazakhstan, which could offer an example of successful economic reforms carried out with U.S. support.

It was highly unlikely that Washington would perform another US-turn in its relations with Tashkent under the pressure of the American strategic establishment's pragmatic wing. This could have affected the interests of Russia and China in Central Asia. There was evidence that the United States had decided to wait until the political regime changed in Uzbekistan. In the summer of 2006, it became more or less obvious that Washington was adjusting its policy toward Tashkent; the contacts between the two countries resumed in August after Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher's visit.

The Results of the US experience in Central Asia

The US policy in Central Asia in general is part of the broader Eurasian strategy that touches upon the Caspian and the Caucasian regions, Russia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Asia and China along with our region.

The US Eurasian strategy in turn is part of Washington's global strategy aimed at retaining US domination in the world economy and financial system, consolidation of its military-strategic superiority, expansion of its geopolitical influence in Eurasia, containment of its potential rivals (China, the European Union, Russia), combating so-called international terrorism that can be understood as establishment of control over the Islamic world.

The main conclusion from the analysis of prospects of possible developments and changing of the character of relations between the Kazakhstan and the US is that the field for political maneuver of Kazakhstan between the US and Russia abruptly converges compared to the previous period. Further there can appear another real threat that Kazakhstan may get in a geopolitical snare; absence of possibilities for political maneuvering and inevitability of choosing in favor of only one geopolitical force would lead to worsening of relations with another side with all the ensuing consequences for its security.

In an effort to realize its strategic and geopolitical purposes the United States use a number of methods and instruments that are not new, but still considered efficient by the White House. They include economic assistance, ideological pressure, and even, applied to special cases, special operations, political provocations and sabotage: artificial organization of political crises, support and funding of oppositional or even if necessary of radical forces, open interference in internal affairs, exaggeration of accusations for corruption, and etc. The sharp criticism in many Western publications of is expanded towards previous US policies, provided in 1990s toward the Central Asia region (so-called Talbot's doctrine).

The positive results of American geopolitical influence on central Asia are doubtless. They are following: actually, having carried out the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 years and having placed the bases in Central Asian countries, the USA have undertaken a role of the main military arbitrator in the center of Eurasia; a role which all other conducting powers of region have refused. It has become obvious that only

American military power could eliminate Taliban regime and remove the direct threat to Central Asia. The Central Asian countries expected that the United States will move toward closer regional cooperation to confirm that it is serious about its plans in the region. Such moves should include additional investments, broader bilateral cooperation in the energy sector, search for a new security model and for possibilities of the US strategic presence in the region that would take the interests of all states into account. It is expected that Washington will tone down its criticism of the situation in the sphere of human rights and democracy.

Military political presence of the US in Central Asia produced both positive and negative consequences. First of all, we have to admit that the US does not intend to leave the region in the short-run or in the medium-run, and probably in the long run. The main positive effect of the US presence here is that the US will in no case allow repeated threat to Central Asia from radical Islam, considering it as a threat to its national interests.

However negative potential of US influence on security and stability in the region can exceed the positive effect in prospects. First of all this concerns involvement of Central Asia in the track of the United States' policy that would inevitably occur in case of Washington's confrontation with neighbors of the region, including Russia, China, and Iran.

Another direction of the US strategy that contains clearly destabilizing potential for the region can be opposition between the US and China on the geopolitical level, which would inevitably touch upon Central Asia that represents a convenient base for the creation of threat to China's strategic rear by the United States. Beijing's reciprocal actions can lead to direct military threat to the region. The most dangerous could be purposeful actions of Washington directed on destabilization of disagreeable regimes and their replacement.

However, according to evaluations of US strategic planning experts, the US long military presence in the region brings in an element of strategic uncertainty. They in particular suggest that American military forces would play important role in the regional affairs in future, and this makes it the

regional military-political force that nobody would be able to ignore. US analysts offer to change the US strategy in the Central Asian region proceeding from the fact that growing anti-American spirits appear as some of reasons for reconsideration of the US current public diplomacy in regard of Central Asia.

Another positive result of the US foreign policy in the region, as considered, is development of nationally oriented civil societies in Central Asia. Majority of analysts believe that the US has to support protection of human rights and other aspects that may resound with the public opinion. This in turn would allow creating a foundation for political movements that would be able to appear as functional opposition to the ruling regime after some time.

The main conclusion related to the US strategy in Central Asia is that it is determined first of all by geopolitical factors. There are some negative elements: instead of providing support in agrarian reforms, high-tech development, expansion of humanitarian aid, the US government focused on the expansion of military political contacts with the Central Asian states; and this forms a core of cooperation between Washington and countries of this region. The concept of “security manager” became popular within the American political circles after the events of September 11, 2001. Its essence comes to that under conditions, when Central Asian states can not protect themselves against the “international terrorism”, and the neighboring great powers are not able to do that, the United States are to take care of security in the region.

The issue of nuclear nonproliferation was extremely important for American policy. That’s why we can estimate the US position toward the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation as the extremely positive one for the region.

The other positive impact of the US security strategy is that, it has made the integration of the new independent states into Western economic, political and military institutions and practices the fundamental regional policy aim. The US foreign assistance to Kazakhstan and the other newly independent states has focused on helping them to reform their economic, political,

and social welfare systems so they can become sustainable market-oriented democracies.

The US policy toward the Caspian issue is complicated. It includes both – the positive and negative elements. So, US interests and policies are easy to analyze. The United States views three aspects of the Trans-Caspian equation as crucial: increasing the supply of energy to consumers; excluding Iran from influencing the exploration, shipment, development and marketing of energy products; and preventing any one state from monopolizing the local energy supply. Certain fundamental corollaries flow from these objectives. Officially US policy aims to enhance local states' capability to produce and ship oil abroad; to obtain equal (that is, competitive) access for US energy firms and other firms that want to invest in these republics; to negotiate settlements to local wars; and to create stable, democratic governments as an ultimate outcome of these processes. The United States strongly opposes Russian efforts to obtain a monopoly and an exclusive sphere of influence over conflict resolution, economies, politics, military agendas and energy supplies in Central Asia.

The US focused on several key points. 1. Both Central Asia and the Caucasus have unique problems and concerns and should not be an adjunct to US policy towards Russia. 2. Conflict resolution is an important element in drafting a successful US policy towards the region. 3. Energy assets are not large enough on their own to justify giving the region a vital status in the analysis of the USA's broad strategic interests.

The US national interests in Central Asia and the Caspian Basin are more derivative than fundamental. The region will be strategically tangential as long as its resources are accessible to competing interests. Apart from oil and gas which may not be plentiful enough to justify a major US commitment to the region, US interests should be viewed as case-specific and part of a wider focus on stability.

A serious mistake of American policy in Central Asia was US relationship with Uzbekistan. The United States also identified Uzbekistan strategically as a key state for stability in Central Asia. The United States' interest

in security cooperation in the region took on new importance after the September 11, 2001, when the United States was able to transform the previous limited level of military cooperation to a much expanded US military presence in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

There were some positive elements in American regional policy. The United States chose not to become directly involved in Central Asia and instead opted for an attentive, wait-and-see policy. From Washington's perspective, it made little sense to become actively embroiled in so explosive a situation, one fraught with rising tensions between Russia and China and further compounded by the threats posed by Islamic extremism. That cautious approach reflected Washington's view that the region was not a priority in terms of fundamental American interests.

What is the region for the Bush administration? It needs to think clearly about the advantages and disadvantages of U.S. predominance in Central Asia. The advantages include short-term stability, access to energy resources, and proximity to Afghanistan. But there are many disadvantages too. U.S. support for existing regimes will help ensure short-term stability, but the real, systemic causes of instability will be swept under the rug. The United States does not need to become Central Asia's 'hegemon': that is, to assume responsibility for its economic development and its stability. The USA faced three options: to be security manager, hegemon or limited partner. In new geo-strategic and international framework the US has chosen a strategic manager role. Certainly, it was a positive decision for the regional security and stability.

From the year 2005 the strategic circles of USA are engaged in debating a new geopolitical project – creation of a Greater Central Asia under the aegis of Washington. The essence of this plan is to bind Central Asia and Afghanistan into a single military-strategic and geopolitical whole which may also include some other neighboring regions. But this project had negatively impacted on Central Asian attitude towards the USA and its goals in the region. The new American strategy (as voiced by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her visit to the region in October 2005) simultaneously takes into account several geopolitical, military-strategic and

regional factors. The project also presupposes realization of a number of organizational-technical and diplomatic measures for the implementation of the American strategy.

So there are no doubts that the American presence and interests in Central Asia have a long-term strategy character. Global integration is yet another trend of American Caspian and Central Asian strategy: the local countries should be involved in world economy and the system of global political, economic, technological, information, and financial relations. The US energy interests and their protection are the main object of American strategy in the region throughout the entire period of its independent development. To pursue this major aim the United States opted for two basic lines: direct investments in oil and gas production and control over the pipelines and construction projects.

Military and political presence of the US in Central Asia produced both positive and negative consequences. First of all, we have to admit that the US does not intend to leave the region in the short-run or in the medium-run, and probably in the long run. The main positive effect of the US presence here is that the US will in no case allow repeated threat to Central Asia from radical Islam, considering it as a threat to its national interests. However, the US long military presence in the region brings in an element of strategic uncertainty.

As regards the US influence and expectations toward Kazakhstan, they may conclude in positive sense: the United States were engaged in encouraging the development of a middle class, as well as democratic forces in the country. Kazakhstan's armed forces, though small in number, are the best trained in the region. They receive assistance from the United States. The army is becoming professional, has a qualified officer corps, maintains close contacts with the U.S. armed forces, and participates in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program. US assistance to the Kazakh military is significant and Kazakhstan has benefited from other U.S. foreign aid funding.

More over, the United States actively supported Kazakh candidacy to assume the chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. The United States and

Kazakhstan share a vital interest in the continuation and ultimate success of Kazakhstan's political and economic transition to a mature, functioning, secular, democratic state. U.S. interests in Kazakhstan transcend oil and Kazakh support for the war on terrorism. They include Kazakhstan's strategic importance as a moderate, pro-Western, secular state. US policy should assist and not undermine the basic great power equilibrium that Kazakhstan is attempting to sustain in order to maintain its independence and pursue economic development and modernization. The United States must continue to emphasize that American interests in Kazakhstan are not limited to oil, security, and counterterrorism.

Kazakhstani-American relations developed due to the implementation of various agreements in the areas of nuclear safety, trade, capital investments, science and technology, legal relations, environment and natural resources conservation, activities of nongovernmental organizations, etc. Kazakhstan's most important Western partner is the United States. The U.S. is the biggest investor in the national oil industry and directly influences the geopolitics of Central Asia and Kazakhstan's security, respectively.

Conclusion

Since 2001, America's policy in Central Asia has been defined by several geopolitical factors: the 9/11 events and the declared "war against international terrorism", America's policy in Eurasia and in the Middle East, relations with Russia, China, and the European Union, as well as the energy and oil factors. At the doctrine level, U.S. foreign policy was confirmed by the 2002 Strategy of National Security, which was partially revised and updated in 2006.

In recent times, four American analytic centers - the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Washington, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University - made an attempt to define U.S. policy in Central Asia.

Details vary from one conception to another, but they all agree that America should preserve its geopolitical domination in Central Asia and through it in Eurasia too.

How we can estimate the American geopolitical experience in Central Asia? Is it success or failure?

On one hand, the Central Asian states remained within the orbit of Russia, including several integrative organizations (EurAsEC, CSTO). Moscow is continuing to control the oil and gas export routes from the region. The local regimes save their authoritarian characters. The civil societies in these states are underdeveloped. The US military and strategic presence in the region is reduced, Uzbekistan, for example, has evacuated the American military bases. In general, Western impact on Central Asia was limited by Russian and China.

From the other hand, Central Asian countries are independent, what is the strategic goal of the West. The threat of Islamic radicalism was demolished, as well as the danger of weapons of mass destruction proliferation.

What are the perspectives of US policy towards the region? Certainly, the new administration in the White House, coming in January 2009, should formulate a new strategy, new objectives; find new methods and new agenda for Central Asia, in any way. Presently United States in its regional strategy is working out changes and additions at tactical and strategic level.

To guarantee the region's sustainable development, the geopolitical actors and parties involved should take the interests of all those involved into account. This particularly applies to Russia and the United States. Washington should take into account Moscow's interests in the region and its concerns about its strategic security. Under no circumstances should the United States undertake a regime change unilaterally, otherwise Russia will regard this as a «game without rules» and will respond accordingly.

The Central Asian states emerged onto the political scene as subjects of international politics more or less in their own right. This is probably the main change that occurred in the geopolitical situation in the region in the 21st century. This could not happen if any one power, the United States

included, dominated there. If the process of transformation of the Central Asian states into «normal» states from the viewpoint of international politics goes on unabated for several more decades, it may trigger a consistent political and economic sustainable advance.

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4

Turkey and Central Asia: From Fraternity to Partnership

Zharmukhamed Zardykhan

Throughout history, despite its frequently anti-European official rhetoric, the Ottoman Empire had been zealously devoted to European recognition and acceptance as a European great power. Therefore, Turkish involvement into Central Asian affairs, the area that acquired great importance in rivalry among the Great Powers from the 19th century on, was often associated with its application as a trump card to achieve European recognition. Therefore, during the period of the rise of the Ottoman Empire, when the transcontinental multiethnic state of the Turks emerged as a major threat to the European balance of powers, Central Asian Turks and Muslims, differently from the Holy Lands or Egypt so much exciting for Europeans, were hardly attractive for the Ottoman sultans both economically or politically. Even during the Crimean War, when the Ottomans fought against the Russian Empire alongside the major European powers, the appeal towards the Turks or Muslims of the Russian Empire was not an item of the strategic and political agenda.

It ought to be noted that the Ottoman concern and involvement with Central Asian Turks and Muslims intensified in the second half of the 19th century, when the European and Mediterranean provinces of the Ottoman Empire, not without European instigation and involvement, broke away from once extensive and glorious domain of the sultans. Moreover, the emergence of the pan-Arab nationalist aspirations and separatist movements

among the Ottoman population in the Near East caused major fear and disappointment among the Ottoman Turks. Considering that most of the Eurasian Turks were under Tsarist rule, whose Muslim population exceeded that of the Ottoman state by the end of the 19th century, Pan-Islamic and Pan-Turkist policies of the Ottoman sultan and caliph aimed not only at undermining Russian expansion and influence among Eurasian Muslims, which directly or indirectly was encouraged and instigated by its European allies, but also at increasing Turkish prestige in Europe as an important transcontinental power and, eventually, its leverage in European affairs. Interestingly, both of these assumptions – undermining Russian dominance and influence in the area (often with Western incentive) and obtaining an attractive bargaining potential vis-à-vis European states for its further integration into Europe – did not drift apart from the Turkish political agenda at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Although Turkish–Central Asian relations at the governmental level are full of inconsistencies, they, nevertheless, provide important indicators for both sides' foreign policy preferences. While during their first years of independence, Central Asian states, with Kazakhstan at the foreground, adhered to their 'integrationist' aspirations for the former Soviet space, the Turkish Republic was fully involved in its attempts to become a full member of the European Union. While Central Asian newly independent states were trying to preserve the gentle balance of their relations with Russia, China, the Western and Islamic worlds and to consolidate their independent statehood, Turkey dealt with its 'Kurdish' problem domestically and with the Cyprus and Aegean Sea problems in the international arena, often facing protests and vetoes by Greece, a full member of the NATO and the EU. This impediment to further integration, as well as the rise of the Islamic Welfare Party [Refah Partisi] and the general political instability of the following governments obstructed the implementation of a stable policy towards Central Asia.

Since its formation in 1923 under the leadership of Kemal Atatürk, the Turkish Republic made the principles of 'Westernism' and 'Secularism' the

main pillars of its international orientation, also aiming at the integration of its economy and political system into that of Western Europe. Today, as in the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union is the major trading partner for Turkey, while the United States are not even among the top three export or import partners. On the eve of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey suffered from the disruption of formally vivid economic relations with the Arab countries, which became an important source of hard currency during the Oil Crisis. Especially after the Gulf War and the imposition of an economic embargo on Iraq, Turkish economic relations with the Arab world considerably declined. In addition, the establishment of close Turkish-Israeli relations in military and intelligence fields seriously ‘offended’ Arab countries, which were immediately reflected in economic transactions.

Following the collapse of the bipolar global system, Turkey started to lose its former privileged status of a ‘fort against the Communist expansion’, so that the West began to dwell on the human and minority rights violations in Turkey. Indeed, the strategic importance of Turkey played in Western foreign and domestic policy due to its geographic proximity to the Soviet Union, which endowed Turkey with substantial military and economic benefits, started withering, creating a feeling of abandonment by the West, following the emergence of pro-Western regimes in Central Europe to function as a new buffer zone between Western Europe and Russia. In the post-Soviet world Armenian lobbies in major Western countries strengthened its activities against Turkey, while the latter’s serious attempts to be integrated into the EU faced Greek vetoes. Under these changing circumstances, Turkey launched an increased involvement in the Central Asian Turkic states in order, among other things, to increase Turkey’s bargaining potential by providing some political, economic, and military advantages.

Despite close ethnic, linguistic and historical kinship, Soviet Central Asia and Turkey had been sharply disrupted by rival ideologies. Practically, they had no direct relations until the last few months of the Soviet statehood. The formal cooperation between Turkey and Central Asian republics star-

ted already in June and October 1990, before the formal break up of the USSR by high level visits and agreements signed and culminated in the visit of the Turkish President Turgut Özal to Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Kazakhstan in March 1991. Already on 15 March 1991, an agreement on cooperation was signed between the Turkish Republic and the then-Kazakh SSR and on 16 December 1991 Turkey was the first state to recognize the independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Upon the formal collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey was the first country not only to recognize the independence of the Central Asian newly independent states, but also to send diplomatic delegations to the region.

Interestingly, all political movements in Turkey tried to gain political credit from the emerging relations with the Central Asian newly independent states. The relations with the Central Asian ‘brothers’ became a matter of major importance, and almost every Turkish Prime Minister visited Central Asia. Moreover, despite the turbulent political atmosphere in Turkey, there was no actual difference between Islamic and nationalistic, rightist or leftist newspapers in their support for the Central Asian Turkic peoples. Besides, Central Asia became a lucrative market for the Turkish medium-scale manufacturing sector and the construction industry, which had been in stagnation after the stopping of gigantic building fields in the oil-rich Arab countries. Often, it was the Turkish government itself that backed and encouraged the advancement of the Turkish business to the newly emerging markets of the region.

As for the Central Asian leaders, Turkey often became the country of their first official visit outside the former Soviet space as presidents of independent states, as well as the forum to make their international debut, where their voices on vital global events were heard for the first time. Thus, in April 1993, during the visit of the Turkish President Turgut Özal to Kazakhstan, the two presidents did not lose the opportunity to declare that the settlements of peace in Bosnia, Mountainous Karabakh and in the Middle East would be possible only through peace negotiations based on the UN and OECD peacekeeping efforts. Moreover, Turkey, a congenial nation

and state, a member of the NATO and the Council of Europe, was close to the West politically and economically, and might provide moral and material support for the devastated economies of the Central Asian states at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the key aspects of the attractiveness of Turkey as a partner in the international arena in the eyes of the Central Asian leadership was its prospective membership of the European Union. Any impediment to Turkish advance towards full EU membership could therefore undermine its reputation and political influence in the region.

In the international arena, Turkey was to become a guaranteed ally, and more importantly, an influential lobby. Besides, Turkey was among the countries that realized the actual power of Central Asian leaders and backed them. Contrary to Western countries, Turkey never criticized the ‘unlimited’ power of Central Asian leaders and refrained from supporting, at least at official level, the opposition groups to the ruling power, a position which made Turkey a comfortable partner for the political elites. Thus, for instance, after the dissolution of the Kazakh parliament by President Nazarbayev in March 1995, Turkish President Süleyman Demirel found his actions as “a convincing confirmation of the triumph of true democracy and the rule of law.”

On the other hand, any serious involvement in Turkish affairs, not to mention so-called Pan-Turkist aspirations, could affect the newly independent states’ sensitive relations and vulnerabilities with Russia and China. The advancement of their Turkic and Muslim identity at official level could cause the displeasure of the Russians and other Slavic populations in the region, who were already discontented with the promotion of national identities based on the republics’ titular nations. Moreover, despite the huge volume of trade and signing of long-term contracts between Turkey and Russia, the policies of these two countries competed in the region. Russia, which intended to re-gain its former superiority and influence over Central Asia, accuses Turkey of trying to buy out the Muslim population of Central Asia, acting on United States’ behalf. Accordingly, Russia launched an

implicit anti-Turkish media campaign, which, while not being harsh, has certainly influenced public opinion of the Central Asian states.

On the other hand, the Western anxiety about the propagation of radical Islam among the Central Asian states by Iran taking advantage of the power vacuum following the collapse of the Soviet Union made the so-called 'Turkish model', which combines secular democratic values with a liberal economy, much more appealing for them. However, the ardent Turkish involvement in Central Asian affairs, as well as the attractiveness of the secular Turkish model started fading following the electoral victory of the moderate, but still Islamist, Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP*), which, besides, set up the European integration as the main priority of Turkish foreign policy.

In regard to the regional states, Turkey enjoys its peculiar feature of being a congenial state for the Central Asian Turkic states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. Tajikistan, being a Persian-speaking state, belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam that makes it different from Shi'a Iran, although initially the linguistic link between Iran and Tajikistan brought in great expectations. As for Turkish policy in Tajikistan, contrary to its euphoric and often unrealistic stance towards their Turkic Central Asian 'brethren', the economic and pragmatic aspects were always at the foreground and therefore the course of the Tajik-Turkish relations remained steady and persistent despite changing political circumstances. As a result, according to the official data, the volume of trade between Turkey and Tajikistan from 1999 to 2006 increased 20.5 times, and 101.96 percent only in the year 2006, leaving far behind all Central Asian states and Russia.

Being the first country to recognize the Central Asian republics' independence, to establish embassies there, and to host Central Asian presidents, Turkey has launched an active cooperation initiative among the Turkic-speaking countries, including Turkey, the four Turkic Central Asian states, and Azerbaijan. The most prominent realization of this cooperation is the 'Turkic summits', which for the time being were held on a systematic basis.

Although the importance of these summits was hardly noticed abroad, they had a vital role for the participants, especially for the Newly Independent States. First, the summits were among the very few forums where the Central Asian states could meet without Russian supervision. Second, it was a place where the Central Asian states could consider their own problems and disputes, generally under the careful and balanced intermediation of Turkey. Third, it was a platform in which the participants, except Kyrgyzstan, were parties with direct interest in Caspian oil and gas production and transportation. Thus, there they could negotiate and determine their claims and interests before other international actors directly concerned with the case became involved. Finally, in addition to all its cultural and economic issues, the sides were granted a chance to harmonize their foreign policy trends and attempts toward certain vital issues.

In January 1992, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TICA) was established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Its primary task was developing a legal and managerial framework for liberalization and democratization that would help the Newly Independent States to adjust to the outside world politically, socially and economically. In 1995, a special Minister of State for the relations with the Turkic states was established within the Turkish government and obtained a permanent status in the Turkish Cabinet.

Thus, driven by Turkey's growing involvement in the region, its euphoria and self-confidence, the then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel uttered the possibility of setting up a 'Union of Turkic States' during his visit to Central Asia in April 1992, making, among other things, further ambitious claims about military assistance to regional states, adoption of Latin script for Turkish as the common alphabet for all Turkic languages and building of pipelines through Turkey. Not surprisingly, the Turkish endeavors to create a gigantic Turkic World stretching from the Adriatic to the Great Wall, were somehow connected, from the Russian point of view, to the rise of "ethnic separatist terrorism in Chechnya", as the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) official website asserted.

The first summit meeting of the ‘Turkic summits’ series was held in Ankara on 30-31 October 1992 and was concluded by the signing of the Ankara Declaration on October 31. A number of agreements were signed, such as setting up telecommunication links, elimination of the travel restrictions, and calls for “a social order, set up on a basis of democratic principles, respect of the human rights, secularism, social justice, and market economy.” However, the Kazakh President expressed, nevertheless, his caution about the establishment of an ethnic and linguistic community, arguing that it “does not bring people together but divides them” (Shaumian, 1998, p. 70). As it is often argued, the Central Asian states which suffered from ‘the younger brother’ complex for a long time, simply did not want Turkish overlordship. Therefore, the ‘Big Brother’ attitude and the assumed ‘enlightening’ or even ‘civilizing’ mission would expectedly lead to resentment on the side of Central Asians, especially since the Turkish policy of comprehension and homogenization of the whole Turkic World would definitely contradict with the intension of the Central Asian states’ to emphasize on their unique identities, which would hardly be proved under another broader umbrella. Therefore, Turkish efforts for regional supremacy could not get along with the aspirations of the Central Asian leadership at the time of the ‘parade of sovereignties’, so that economy, rather than politics or social affairs, became the sole field of success for ardent Turkish endeavors.

After the Istanbul summit, the meetings of the Turkic Summits held in Bishkek (1995), Tashkent (1996), and Astana (1998) started to lose their primal importance, while bilateral relations became more important. Especially after the cooling of Uzbek-Turkish relations, the homogeneity of Turkish relations with the Central Asian republics was damaged. The President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurad Niyazov, did not participate in the Fifth Turkic Summit in Astana which was instead attended by the Chairman of the Turkmen Parliament Sahad Muradov, while both Presidents Karimov of Uzbekistan and Niyazov did not participate in the summits held in Baku in April 2000. As is often stated, the rhetorical inclination of the Central Asian states towards prospective Turkic union, or at least a somewhat positive res-

ponse to Turkish calls, were associated only to the early 1990s, the desperate period following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when even modest Turkish subsidies to the Central Asian leadership were essential, if not vital.

The late Turkish efforts to revive the 'Turkic Summits' and gather the heads of the Turkic-speaking countries, following almost five years of activity decay, were put into practice at the 8th Turkic Summit in Antalya, in November 2006. However, the promising endeavors to strengthen Turkish Central Asian involvement, regarded by some as an attempt to make up the neglectful Central Asian policy by the AKP government, were saddened by the absence of Uzbek and Turkmen presidents. The Turkmen government was represented at the Summit by their ambassador in Ankara, while the Uzbek government, angered by the Turkish support for the UN Report on Uzbekistan condemning grave human rights violations following the Andijan events. Nevertheless, in accordance with the late Turkish policy, economic relations were at the foreground of the Summit's agenda, with special emphasis on coordinated energy policy and diversification of the transport routes for Central Asian energy resources. Interestingly, the official request by the Russian government to be granted observer status to the Turkic Summit in Antalya, justified by the fact that Russia holds in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, was denied by Ankara on the ground that these summits only gathered Turkish-speaking states.

Noteworthy, just a month prior to the Turkic Summit, the Turkish resort of Antalya hosted the 10th Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation Congress of the Turkic States and Communities. The scope of the Congress far exceeds Turkish-speaking independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, involving in representative of Tajikistan, Mongolia, Northern Cyprus, as well as numerous representatives from certain autonomous units and ethnic communities like Crimea, Daghestan, Tatarstan, Sakha, Afghanistan, Kosovo and Australia. Moreover, the 11th Congress was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, for the first time outside Turkey. Besides certain cultural and scientific efforts, like the establishments of common Turkic alphabet and common Academy of Science of the Turkic World, as the Congress declara-

tion states, the energy resources were never off the agenda. Strikingly, the formation of an OPEC-like institution among the oil and gas rich Turkic states was even proposed at the Congress.

One of the most important reasons that had spurred Turkish involvement in the region were the energy resources of the Caspian Sea that could strengthen the Turkish position in Europe and the whole world both in economic and political terms. Interestingly, as was uttered by the Turkish President Süleyman Demirel at the summit of the Turkic States in Bishkek in August 1995, the Turkish endeavors to arrange the passage of Kazakh, Turkmen and Azerbaijani oil and gas through Turkey were not guided by economic benefits, but by its interest to lessen their economic and political dependence on Russia.

Turkey, with its growing population and economy and lack of hydrocarbon energy resources, is itself severely dependent on external energy sources. In fact, the Caspian Sea resources seemed optimal for Turkey's economic, foreign and security policy because supplies from Iran, Russia or the Arab countries affect its relations with Europe and the USA. Also, construction of a pipeline through Turkey to Europe would become the sole stable route for oil and gas transportation for the land-locked Central Asian countries, making Turkey the major energy outlet to Europe as well as reaping with economic gains through transportation and service fees.

In the second half of the 1990s, Turkish–Central Asian relations were stabilized. The expectations and initial euphoria of both sides were not attained. Turkey could not obtain the dominant position among the regional states to replace Russian influence. Central Asian states finally realized that having Turkey as a close ally was not enough to get substantial external support, either financial or political, and that Russia was still an important chain for their development, at least for the time being. The weakening of Turkey's position in Central Asia as well as its efforts towards the region were mainly due to its constant political and economic turmoil, which culminated in grave economic crises in the late 1990s and in 2001, while the visible self-confidence in foreign affairs following the years of political and

economic stability after 2002, made the EU axis and relations with neighboring countries the top priority of the Turkish foreign policy. Therefore, contrary to the dualist stance of Turkish initial policy towards the region, when advancement of its own interests in the region often appealing to the Pan-Turkist call went hand in hand with the proliferation of pro-Western policies, the recent Turkish attitude focuses more on pragmatic policies aiming at its own economic benefits, the Caspian energy resources being one of its main pillars.

Turkish prospective involvement in the region might be even more efficient than in the past, since Turkey has recently built positive balanced relations based mainly on economic cooperation with all major regional powers, including Russia, China, Iran, India, Pakistan, as well as with major global actors like the EU and the United States, and this would, certainly, strengthen its position as an important trade partner and an alternative route for regional energy resources with regard to Central Asia. Moreover, contrary to the 1990s, when Turkey was often regarded as the strategic competitor to Russian interests in the region, Turkey is now perceived by Russia in considerably neutral terms.

Although often neglected, Turkey played an important role in the reinforcement of the Central Asian states' independence and the development of their economies with its financial, technical and educational support. Interestingly, private entrepreneurs and their personal efforts facilitated Turkish involvement in regional economies, notwithstanding opposite developments at the governmental level. Also, many Turkish specialists and companies are engaged in fulfillment of many projects initiated and financed by Western companies, especially in the field of construction, such as Alarko Holding, Okan Holding, Enka, Ceylan and many others. The actual range of Turkish involvement is therefore bigger than it seems. Moreover, some Turkish businessmen became notorious for their personal relations with the economic and political elite in Central Asia, as was the case of Ahmet Çalık's alleged liaison with the late Turkmen President Niyazov, earning the former the nickname of a 'power broker'.

Besides the Turkish contribution to the republic's economic and political development, Turkey created a new 'society' that is akin to Turkish culture and language through a number of student exchange programs and the establishment of educational institutions at the secondary and higher educational levels. Through the student exchange program initiated by the Turkish Government in 1992 that eventually became known as the Great Student Exchange Project, which only for the first decade of its realization provided more than 20,000 scholarships for the students from the Turkic world to study in Turkish universities and high schools. Besides, 127 Turkish private schools with more than 21,000 students and 2,000 teaching staff, as well as 13 universities with about 3,000 students and 400 academic staff were functioning in the CIS countries, with Kazakhstan leading with 31 high schools in 1997. Moreover, despite the officially secular stance of Turkish foreign policy, the Turkish government encouraged and subsidized religious education for Central Asian Muslims, and currently holds a position of an advisor on religions matters in Turkish embassies in Central Asia, mainly dealing with religious education.

Nevertheless, especially during the first half of the 1990s, the Turkic aspect, rather than Islamic, was perceived as the emphasis of the Turkish policy towards the region. Ironically the Turkish endeavor to modernize Central Asia by creating an educated elite through the Great Student Exchange Program would later turn into the matter of great tension between Uzbekistan and Turkey, when following the victory of the Islamic Welfare Party in the 1996 parliamentary elections, the Turkish side was accused of supporting Uzbek dissidents and training Islamic extremists among Uzbek students, which would ultimately lead to the withdrawal of Uzbek students studying in Turkey. However, despite the accusations of instigating Islamic extremism among Uzbek students studying in Turkey – since it was never brought in by other Central Asian states - the resentment of the Uzbek government was mainly caused by granting political asylum by the Turkish government to Muhammed Solikh, the prominent Uzbek opposition leader.

As for Turkey, Turkish–Central Asian relations also provided certain advantages to the Turkish political and geostrategic position along with the economic gains. First, the Turkish republic seems to have obtained a new bloc of allies among regional countries that could facilitate Turkey’s key role in the region. To a certain extent, the Newly Independent States enlarged Turkish vision and bargaining power, especially in its relations with Europe. Second, Turkey enjoyed, for a time being, support and understanding from these countries for its delicate Kurdish and Cyprus problems and naturally gained an additional number of advocates at broader international forums.

However, just like the pragmatic considerations to overcome international isolation and advancing its interests in the so-called ‘pipeline war’ made Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan the preferential partners in the region for the Islamic Republic of Iran instead of Tajikistan that had been the main focus of regional policy, Turkey, while implementing its policies towards Central Asia, had to take into account the attitude of Russia. Indeed, as a result of Turkey’s intensified pro-European orientation, its discord with the US policy towards Iraq, rapprochement between Ankara and Moscow and the enhancement of their economic ties that currently made Russia its chief exporting partner, made Turkey no further be perceived as proxy for the United States or even associated with Western policy in the region, which, as is often claimed, helped Turkey preserve its position in Uzbekistan despite exacerbation of Uzbek–Western relations following the Andijan events, while the power shift in Kyrgyzstan even strengthened its positions in the country.

For Central Asian states, Turkey became a gate to the outside world, both economically and politically, and Turkish support really contributed to their independent state-building. Turkey, a state with a Eurasian version of Western democracy and market economy, was regarded as an optimal vector of development for these newly independent Muslim Turkic states. Moreover, the secularism of the Turkish state system made it a preferable option than other Muslim states. As was once stated by Alejandro Lorca, Turkey would play the same role as Spain played for Latin American countries in relations with the EU, which is described by the so-called ‘bridge theory’. According to this theory

certain linkages with Spain, such as historical and linguistic bonds, facilitate economic relations of Latin American states with the EU and make Spain become a 'natural lobby' in Europe in favor of Latin American states. As was once stated by Süleyman Demirel, the then Turkish Prime Minister, "in Central Asia we are the emissaries of Europe. We are Europeans who are taking European values to Central Asia. We want to remain European. (Hyman, 1994, p. 258)." For Central Asian states this was a great chance to have a 'European brother'.

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5.

Japan's Hesitant Embrace of Central Asia: Will There Be a strategy?

Nargis Kassenova

In 2003 a prominent expert on Central Asia Tomohiko Uyama published a paper in which he analyzed Japan's policy toward Central Asia and came to the conclusion that it does not have a strategy. That was due to lack of major national interests in the region and the overall 'non-strategic' approach of Japanese foreign policy. However, in his view, no strategy (or grand strategy) is an advantage of Japan's approach to Central Asia for it allows to increase engagement in the region without contributing to the geopolitical competition or the 'Great Game', and be more sensitive to the needs of Central Asian countries.

Has there been change since then? Japan got seriously engaged in the military and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, a neighbor of Central Asia and introduced the 'Central Asia plus Japan' initiative ushering in a new multilateral approach. Japanese former Minister of Foreign Affairs (and current Prime Minister) Taro Aso announced a new pillar of Japan's foreign policy – promotion of universal values of democracy, human rights and rule of law and building an Arc of Freedom and Prosperity on the outer rim of Eurasia, including the region of Central Asia. Japanese companies signed deals with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the strategic nuclear energy sector. Do these developments signal the formation of a strategy implying specific goals and ways to achieve them?

Japan's engagement in Central Asia: Past and Present

Before the dissolution of the USSR, there were virtually no links between Japan and Central Asia. At the end of WW2 about 600,000 Japanese prisoners of war were sent to work at construction sites and factories in Siberia and Central Asia.

Some of them died and were buried in Central Asia, others could return home.

They left good memory behind - residents of Almaty and Tashkent know that many of the most beautiful landmark buildings in their cities were built by Japanese POWs.

There is also an imaginary historical link that influences the development of relations of Japan with Central Asian states – the legendary Silk Road that until the 15th century tied Europe with the Middle East, Central Asia and the Far East. Mentions of Central Asia evoke in the minds of the Japanese public the images of the Silk Road: camels, traders and treasures.

Once former Soviet Asian republics became independent states, Japan moved in rather quickly. Unlike European states (except for Germany), Japan opened embassies in all five CA states: in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1993, in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2002 and 2003 accordingly, and in Turkmenistan in 2005. Japan showed more interest in Central Asia than in other former Soviet states (apart from Russia, traditionally a very important neighbor). The special attention can be explained by the Asian identity of Japan.

Japan positioning itself as the leader in Asia and the locomotive of regional development, saw Central Asian states as a part of Asia in need of Japanese development assistance. The volume of grants and soft loans provided by Japan through the Japanese International Cooperation Agency and Japanese Bank of International Cooperation is significant. By 2006 Japan's Official Development Aid (ODA) amounted to more than US\$2.5 billion, or about 30% of all the ODA by the member countries of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. By comparison, the EU development assistance to Central Asia stood at about US\$1.5 billion (1.3 billion euro).

Japan's ODA was spent mainly on projects helping the transition to a market economy, the building of socioeconomic infrastructure, investments in healthcare and education, and protection of the environment.

Japan contributed to the conflict-resolution during the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997) and provided assistance to the peace process afterwards. Japanese government has been giving emergency aid for internally afflicted persons and refugees from Afghanistan, flood, mudslide and draught disasters on a regular basis. Some assistance is provided through the UN Trust for Human Security set up in 1999 through the initiative of Japan.

As a regional leader Japan could make a good start in Central Asia. Newly independent Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were a part of Asia with no negative historical baggage regarding Japan's militarist past. It was not a problem for Central Asian governments to support Japan's bid for the permanent seat in the UN Security Council, one of the main goals of Japan's foreign policy. It might become so in the future, if there is significant growth of China's political influence in the region.

In the eyes of Central Asians, Japan is an advanced Asian country, combining highest technologies with preserving culture and tradition, an example to follow. According to the results of the Asia Barometer Survey conducted in all five Central Asian states in 2005, 40% of respondents thought that Japan has a good or rather good influence on their country.

The importance of Central Asia for Japan arose from two features: the geostrategic location of the region in-between Russia, China and the Islamic world, and its rich energy resources. Central Asia is sandwiched between Russia and China, two biggest and most important neighbors of Japan. Initially, Japanese policy makers were expecting that friendly governments in Central Asia would put some pressure on Russia in the question of Northern territories (the territorial dispute over the four islands that impedes the signing of the peace treaty between Japan and Russia). However, soon they realized that it was unrealistic to expect weak Central Asian states do that to their closest ally and patron.

The rise of China over the last couple of decades threw down a challenge to Japan. Chinese economy has been rapidly growing and so has its

influence in Asia and the world. Japan and China are competing for a bigger role as regional leaders in South-East Asia and South Asia. Tokyo is attentively watching the increasing engagement of China in Central Asia, the growing trade, and economic and political cooperation arrangements. Of special concern for Japanese policy makers is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a regional security and economic cooperation organization, which includes four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), China and Russia.

The SCO is seen as an organization that largely promotes China's interests in Central Asia. Some experts express their fear that it might turn into a military-political alliance next door to Japan. At present, Japanese policy makers and experts are considering a proper policy with regard to this organization. This issue was discussed, for example, at "The Prospects of Central Asia – East Asia Cooperation" forum that gathered policy makers and experts in Tokyo in February 2008.

Akihiro Iwashita from Hokkaido University is promoting the idea of Japan becoming a dialogue partner of the SCO. He argues that it will be beneficial both for Japan and SCO member-states. For the SCO that would mean more prestige, the diminishment of the 'balancing' (anti-Western) dynamic, and constructive regional cooperation with global support. For Japan such an arrangement would bring prestige and new mechanisms to interact with Central Asian states, China and Russia. It would also help Japan to redefine and develop its role in its security relations with the United States.

In 2004 Japan launched its own regional cooperation initiative 'Central Asia plus Japan' dialogue that includes all five Central Asian states. In 2006 Afghanistan was invited to participate as a guest. It can be speculated that it is not only a mechanism to promote regional integration but also an attempt to counterbalance to some extent the growing role of China in the region through the creation of an alternative to the SCO regional cooperation arrangement.

Japan is a major importer of energy resources: oil, gas and uranium. In the 1990s Japanese energy companies were attracted by the promise of Caspian oil and gas resources and got involved in projects in Kazakhstan and

Azerbaijan. The INPEX company became member of the international consortium developing the Kashagan oil field in the Caspian offshore, and its share in the project is 8.33%. Kashagan is the largest oil field outside the Middle East, estimated to hold between 9 and 13 billion barrels.

Due to a significant distance between Japan and the region, it is very difficult for Japan to benefit from Central Asian oil and gas directly. INPEX together with JNOC (Japanese National Oil Corporation) explored the possibility of exporting Caspian oil via Iran, but this transportation option proved problematic due to the political constraints.

In 1998 Mitsubishi together with CNPC (Chinese National Petroleum Corporation) and Exxon made a preliminary feasibility study of a possible gas pipeline Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan-China-Japan. The construction of the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan-Western China pipeline started in 2008. It is not clear whether Japan can eventually receive Central Asian gas.

While it is difficult for Japan to benefit from Central Asian hydrocarbons directly, it is interested in getting them to the global market. Itochu Corporation is a member of the consortium that built the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline that started transporting Azerbaijani oil to the Turkish port of Ceyhan in 2006. Kazakhstan is transporting some of its oil via this pipeline and is planning to increase the volume once Kashagan field gets online. Itochu and INPEX joined the international Central Asian gas pipeline consortium that had plans to join Turkmen gas fields through Afghanistan with Pakistan and India. The project received support of the Japanese government, but is on hold due to the security situation in Afghanistan.

Central Asian uranium interests Japan even more than oil and gas. In August 2006 Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In Kazakhstan he signed and in Uzbekistan he negotiated cooperation agreements in the uranium development sector. In 2007-8, a number of agreements were signed between Japanese companies Marubeni, Mitsui, Sumitomo, Toshiba and Sijitz with and Central Asian counterparts.

Kazakhstan is of particular importance since it holds about 19% of the world uranium reserves. Japan is one of the main producers of nuclear energy

and plans to cover up to 40 percent of its uranium needs with imports from Kazakhstan. Recently Kazakhstan has been showing considerable interest in developing a more comprehensive cooperation with Japan. It sees Japan as a valuable source of technologies and investments that can help it diversify the economy. If Japan-Kazakhstan cooperation in the nuclear energy field goes well, Japan can acquire a hard-core interest in the region (that has been missing so far) and that can become an important anchor for Japan's policy in the region.

As this overview shows Japan has been consistently making effort to enhance ties with the newly independent states of Central Asia. Various factors and developments influenced Japan's policies in the region. Japanese decision-makers had to consider various opportunities, challenges and constraints. To make the engagement more effective, they tried to come with a specific approach to Central Asia.

Developing an approach to Central Asia

Over the last two decades, Japanese policy makers made several attempts to develop a strategy toward the region of Central Asia. The first formulation was made by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, who pioneered the 'Silk Road diplomacy' as part of the new 'Eurasia diplomacy'. In 2004 Japanese government launched the 'Central Asia plus Japan' dialogue initiative marking the new multilateral approach to the region. In 2006 it was followed in by Taro Aso's initiatives of the creation of the Corridor of Peace and Stability in Central Asia as part of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity stretching from East Asia to the Baltic states.

Ryutaro Hashimoto's 'Eurasian diplomacy'

In June 1997 Keizo Obuchi, a leading member of the Japanese Diet, headed the Mission for Dialogue with Russia and Central Asia. The Obuchi mis-

sion consisted of Diet members, businessmen and scholars. The goal was to achieve a breakthrough in relations with Russia and develop a new diplomacy toward Central Asia as the heartland of changing Eurasia. As was stated by one of the Obuchi mission members Dr. Yutaka Akino, “while developing Silk Road diplomacy toward Central Asia as the new heartland, Japan should try to achieve a breakthrough in relations with Russia in the game of the new international system in Eurasia, by the US, China, India and the EU”(Yuasa, 2007).

The mission made the final report with a number of recommendations. With regard to Russia, it was proposed to hold a summit meeting between Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto and Russia President Yeltsin and support Russia’s entry into the Asia-Pacific Cooperation (APEC). As for Central Asia, it was suggested to continue economic support, encourage an exchange of high-level visits, establish a parliament member assembly with Central Asian counterparts, and create a direct airline between Tokyo and Tashkent in 2003.

In July 1997 Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto made an address to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives in which he formulated the new ‘Eurasian diplomacy’ of Japan. He started his speech with the analysis of the state of the world stating that in the post-Cold war world Japan was to acquire new dynamism and forge a perspective on Eurasia viewed from the Pacific Ocean rather than the Atlantic. Hashimoto noted “the slow but certain birth of a new Russia” and the challenges of transition facing China and said that the developments in these two great powers held the key to the formation of an international order.

Central Asia or the ‘Silk Road’ region was noted for its strategic location and therefore importance for peace and prosperity of its neighbors, Russia and China, who are also neighbors of Japan; energy reserves and possibility of being a bridge connecting Europe with Asia. Since Central Asian states had “great expectations of Japan as an Asian country”, and at the same time, Japan had “deep-rooted nostalgia for this region stemming from the glory of days of the Silk Road”, Japanese assistance for their nation-building

efforts could be very positive and constructive both for these countries and for peace and prosperity of Russia, China and the Islamic states.

Hashimoto announced that Japan's foreign policy towards the region would be channeled into three directions: 1) political dialogue to enhance trust and mutual understanding; 2) economic cooperation as well as cooperation for natural resource development aiming to foster prosperity; 3) cooperation to build peace through nuclear non-proliferation, democratization and the fostering of stability.

Hashimoto stated that Japan's foreign toward Central Asia (or the Silk Road region) would be crafted as an organic component of the broad scheme of relations with Eurasia, first of all Russia and China. Japan was considering major changes in the Eurasian space and wanted to adjust its policies by developing new approaches to the main components of this space. Tokyo signaled that while maintaining the US-Japan security alliance as the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy, it is ready to broaden its horizons and take more initiative with regard to its close and distant neighborhood.

Importantly, Hashimoto pointed out that it was necessary to avoid confrontation in Eurasia. That could be helped by creative thinking and examining wide possibilities for cooperation. The statement reflects Japan's inclination for developing cooperative frameworks.

Hashimoto's "Eurasian Diplomacy" was ambitious and optimistic. It is not surprising that it was hard to live up to. There was very little progress, if any, progress in negotiations with Russia regarding the Northern Territories issue. Japan's policy toward Central Asia, while developing, did not become "an organic component of the broad scheme of relations with Eurasia."

The 2004 launch of Central Asia plus Japan dialogue

A new set of factors contributed to changes in Japan's policy in the region. The 9/11 terrorist attack led to the beginning of the military campaign in Afghanistan. Japan has participated in the military effort by kee-

ping a deployment in the Indian Ocean, and made a major commitment to the reconstruction of the country. By doing it, it showed solidarity with its key ally, the United States. The US started building infrastructure and promoting cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asia in a scheme that is usually referred to as Greater Central Asia Partnership, and so did Japan.

It can be speculated that the creation of the SCO in 2001 also gave some food for thought to Japanese policy makers. The SCO was becoming an economic cooperation organization led by China, the key competitor of Japan in Asia. Whatever the motivation, Japanese policy makers started considering regional cooperation and integration schemes for Central Asia.

In spring 2004, the Japan-Central Asia symposium took place, at which Tetsuji Tanaka, advisor to Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev, aired an idea of a Central Asia plus Japan regional economic integration forum, with possible observers – South Korea and Turkey.

Already in summer 2004, during Foreign Minister Yuriko Kawaguchi's visit to four Central Asian states, the 'Central Asia plus Japan' dialogue was initiated. On top of the traditional goal of enhancing the bilateral relations, the new policy added the focus on "engaging in dialogue and building cooperation with Central Asia as a whole". At the meeting that was held in Astana, it was confirmed that in order for the Central Asian countries to work together in unity and develop further in the future, it was vital to promote intra-regional cooperation to face such regional challenges as illegal drugs, terrorism, environment, energy, water, transportation, trade, and investment. Japan expressed the intention to support such efforts.

The first senior official-level meeting under the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue framework was held in March 2005. It defined five pillars: (1) political dialogue, (2) intra-regional cooperation, (3) business promotion, (4) intellectual dialogue and (5) cultural and people-to-people exchange (including tourism).

At the Second Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in Tokyo in June 2006, under the chairmanship of Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso, the Action Plan for the Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue was adopted. The participants

agreed to promote cooperation centering on the five areas of: (1) political dialogue, (2) intra-regional cooperation, (3) business promotion, (4) intellectual dialogue, and (5) cultural and human exchanges (including tourism), as its pillars. The intra-regional cooperation section included 9 fields: terrorism and narcotics, clearance of anti-personnel mines, poverty alleviation, health and medical care, environment, energy/water, trade and investment, and transport. It was agreed that Japanese ODA would be used for a variety of measures to promote intra-regional cooperation.

Apart from Central Asian and Japanese officials, for the first time the meeting was attended by a representative of Afghanistan. In the Action Plan Japan expressed readiness to examine the possibility of assisting Tajikistan and Afghanistan in improving their border-control facilities and also help with building transport routes from Central Asia to South Asia through Afghanistan for the development and prosperity of this landlocked region. This arrangement follows the blueprint of the Greater Central Asia Partnership promoted by the American policy makers.

During her visit to the region Kawaguchi stressed that Japan had no selfish objectives toward Central Asia. That is the feature of Japan's regional cooperation project that was to appeal to Central Asian states engaged in a difficult geopolitical balancing act with the great powers (Russia, China and the US). Central Asian states were very positive toward the initiative for they saw Japan as a valuable source of assistance, however, it is clear that they did not see the Central Asia plus Japan arrangement as an alternative to Russia and China-run regional integration and cooperation projects (Eurasian Economic Community and Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

Japan's new emphasis on multilateralism with regard to Central Asia can be considered as part of the general trend to use more multilateral approaches in Japan's foreign policy. Takeshi Yuasa sees it as the emerging approach to the region that responds to the trends of the time – better conditions for cooperation and respect for diversity. However, it is important to keep in mind that Japan's multilateralism differs from that practiced in Europe – Takashi Inoguchi defines it as a “bilaterally networked

multilateralism”, that is “a set of bilateral networks and joint works enveloped in a multilateral space” (Inoguchi, 2007, pp.58-59). This might save Japan from the frustration felt by European promoters of regional integration in Central Asia.

Central Asia as a Corridor of Peace and Stability and part of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity

On June 1, 2006, on the eve of the second meeting of Foreign Ministers of the ‘Central Asia plus Japan’ dialogue, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso gave a speech ‘Central Asia as a Corridor of Peace and Stability’, which added another element to Japan’s policy toward the region. He reiterated the emphasis on regional cooperation, but also spoke about the importance of promotion of universal values of democracy, human rights and rule of law.

Aso characterized the region of Central Asia as ‘home to an intricate web of concerns and interests from various sources of influence’ and pointed to the existence of multiple overlapping regional organizations, such as the SCO. However, in his opinion, it is important that Central Asian states should not be ‘tossed about by, or forced to submit to the interests of outside countries as a result of a ‘New Great Game’, they should be ‘in the driving seat’. It is clear that the comment primarily implied two big neighbors of Central Asia – China and Russia.

Aso pointed out that Japan is seeking a more proactive role in Central Asia and defined three guidelines for engagement: 1) approach the region from a broader perspective; 2) support for open regional cooperation; and 3) seeking partnership rooted in holding universal values in common. The ‘broader perspective’ means the inclusion of Afghanistan in the thinking about the region and developing a ‘southern corridor’ from Central Asia to Afghanistan and the seas of South Asia. The ‘support for open regional cooperation’ reveals the intention to help the region resist domination by big neighboring powers. The third guideline, as already mentioned, reflects the

new tentative pillar of Japan's foreign policy, promotion of the 'universal values' of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

On November 30, 2006 Taro Aso gave a speech at the Japan Institute of International Affairs dwelling on two topics: "value-oriented diplomacy" standing for more emphasis on the "universal values" such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy; and the role it can play in building the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity on the outer rim of Eurasia (stretching from Northeast Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states).

According to Aso, the "value-oriented diplomacy" would show the world that Japan has come of age, that Japanese people should let go the way of thinking that make them squirm when they see their reflection in the mirror. It means that Japan has shed its military past and can finally feel at ease as a successful democratic country worthy of respect.

Aso compares democracy to a "never-ending marathon" with the beginning ("the first five kilometers") being the most difficult part, and states that Japan could serve as an "escort runner" to support the countries that have just started into this marathon. In assisting these countries as they take these steps forward, Japan would "aim to usher in a world order that is tranquil and peaceful". Japan would develop contacts with the Community of Democratic Choice (Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania and Romania) and GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), and help Central Asian states with the "fundamental groundwork in nation-building", first of all the formulation of the legal and judicial systems.

Interestingly, Aso justifies the choice of Eurasia for applying the value-oriented diplomacy by pointing out that Japan is looking to strengthen its cooperation both with the EU and NATO. Thus, the EU is seen as a natural ally and Eurasia is framed as an area of joint responsibility. The views from the Pacific and from the Atlantic are closer than ever.

Japan would also bond with "friendly nations that share the common views and interests", such as Australia and India, and work with them towards the expansion of this "arc of freedom and stability". Japan's efforts to advance rela-

tions with India are generally seen as motivated by the rivalry with China for leadership in Asia. The appearance of “value-oriented diplomacy” can also be seen as an indication of Japan’s search for a new role in Asia, a response to changing geopolitical environment. Japan needs allies and a sense of purpose that would give it the self-respect and prestige that it seeks.

Possibilities for partnership between Japan and the EU in Central Asia

It is clear that over the past decade Japanese policy makers have been trying to come up with an approach to Central Asia that would go beyond the general developmental agenda and take into account the geopolitical context and contest in the region, an approach that would classify as a strategy. The lack of clear interests made this task difficult. Nevertheless, the consistency of effort shows that Japan is not ready to give up but rather wants to play an increasingly proactive role.

It is also clear that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for Japan to make a difference in the region on its own. It is too remote, while other powers are next door to Central Asian countries. Since 9/11 it has aligned its policies with the US, its key security ally. It supported cooperation between Central Asia and Afghanistan and contributed to building transport infrastructure that would help communication between them. However, as is reflected in Aso’s speech on the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, Japanese policy makers see the EU as natural partner for making the outer rim of Eurasia, including Central Asia, free and prosperous through the promotion of a set of values characteristic for the ‘political West’ that Japan is part of.

Therefore, it would not be too far-fetched and unrealistic to consider the possibility of a partnership between Japan and the EU of Central Asia. Both are intent on increasing their engagement in the region. Albeit with variations in approaches and accents, both have democratization, promotion of the rule of law and human rights, market reforms, and intra-regional cooperation on their agenda. Very importantly, both actors prefer multilateral

and cooperative frameworks. They do not want to antagonize the neighbors of Central Asian states, Russia and China, since the latter are very important neighbors for Japan and the EU as well.

The non-antagonistic approach can be the most productive in Central Asia. It would help to avoid unnecessary competition and maybe be conducive to joint efforts by great powers to develop the region. For Central Asian states both Japan and the EU are very attractive partners. They are highly developed, rich, and ready to provide assistance in a “non-selfish” way. They take sustainable development seriously and are highly responsible stakeholders in international politics. The EU and Japan can also counterbalance the increasing influence of China and growing assertiveness of Russia. In short, they can be valuable sources of modernization and political support.

It is worth noting that since 2005 the EU and Japan have been holding regular Strategic Dialogues on Central Asia. European countries and Japan cooperate in the framework of multilateral donors and donor coordination arrangements. Japan is an OSCE Partner for Co-operation in Asia with a special status due to its contribution to European security. Thus, there is already a base to build a stronger partnership for Central Asia on.

Developing cooperative frameworks with Russia and China

Russia and Japan do not see each other as competitors in Central Asia. Although at the beginning, Japanese policy makers were hoping that friendly Central Asian states could influence Russia with regard to the territorial issue, they very soon gave up on the idea. Since then Japan-Russia and Japan-Central Asia relations have been developing rather autonomously, and Ryutaro Hashimoto's Eurasian diplomacy did not introduce major change into that.

Japanese experts see a great potential for Japan-Russia cooperation. Russia has the natural resources Japanese industries need, and Japan has financial resources and technologies that Russia needs to diversify its economy and

develop. Experts predict growing tensions between Russia and China due to the changing balance of power between the two, and believe that Russia and Japan could become partners in Asian geopolitics. A major expert on Japan-Russia relations Shigeki Hakamada considers that the time has come for Russia to see its own interest clearly and re-open (or re-discover) Japan.

If Japan increases its engagement in Central Asia, it can raise some suspicions in Russia (after all, Japan is a close ally of the United States). However, with time Russia and Japan can grow closer and that might lead to mutually beneficial cooperation in Central Asia.

China has become a serious competitor of Japan in their quest for leadership in Asia. Central Asia might not be the most important 'battlefield' but it has significance for both countries. For China Central Asia is a neighboring region and its strategic rear, a source of natural resources and additional markets. The interests of Japan in the region are less vital, but also important. Central Asia is a source of energy reserves and a friendly and free of historical grudges part of Asia. The more Central Asia falls under the influence of China, the less space will be left for Japan's leadership.

It is important to note that Japan and China have joint interest in the energy sphere. As already mentioned, Japanese and Chinese companies have been working on projects that would bring Central Asian oil and gas to East Asia. However, Japan also supports energy transport routes to the West (as shown by the participation of the Japanese company Itochu in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline consortium).

Conclusions

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with Central Asian states in early 1990s, Japan has been trying to develop an effective approach to the region. It made a serious commitment as a development assistance provider and was able to establish very good relations with Central Asian states. However, Japanese policy makers found it very challenging to shape a policy toward

Central Asia that would be a component of a general Eurasian strategy or Eurasian diplomacy. Lack of vital or very important interests and lack of clarity in terms of strategies with regard to major Eurasian powers - Russia and China – are major reasons behind this “failure”. On the other hand, the consistency of effort to formulate such a policy shows that it can eventually emerge.

A number of factors and developments stimulate the formation of a more strategic approach of Japan to Central Asia. Firstly, Japan is actively searching for a new role in Asian and global politics. It is adapting, but also trying to shape the ongoing geopolitical shifts triggered by the rise of China, transformations in Russia, changing security arrangements in Eurasia, to name a few. Central Asia can become an important component of Japan's reconfigured foreign policy doctrine.

It would be extremely difficult for Japan to achieve significant results without a partner or partners in Central Asia. The EU can become such a partner. Japan and the EU share the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, they are major promoters of sustainable development, they have proclivity for multilateralism, and they already have an institutional base for such a partnership in Central Asia on the basis of bilateral relations and in the framework of OSCE.

Both Japan and the EU try to have good relations with Russia and China and assume responsibility for peace and security in the Eurasian space. Therefore, it is possible to conceive that they will be able to create cooperative frameworks with Russia and China in Central Asia, which would greatly benefit the rest of Eurasia. For Central Asia that would be the best-case scenario.

Central Asian states have always welcomed more engagement by Japan. Central Asian economies can benefit from Japanese investments and technologies. The governments appreciate its generous assistance and “softer touch” with regard to political and economic reforms. It is worth nothing that, although the touch is soft, Japan strongly holds the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and will be transmitting them. Overall, Japan and the EU, especially if they combine their efforts, can become major sources of modernization in Central Asia.

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6

The EU in Central Asia: Incentives and Constraints for Greater Engagement

Nicolás de Pedro

Central Asia is a region of growing relevance for the EU. Firstly, it is a volatile area that must face significant challenges and threats, many of which are of no traditional nature, such as drug trafficking, Islamic extremism, environmental degradation, pandemics, etc., which have a direct impact on European security. A hypothetical breakdown of the region could have a serious negative impact on key EU interests. Secondly, the region has emerged as a major area for the EU's strategy to diversify its energy supply with the objective of reducing its reliance on imports from Russia. Thirdly, Central Asia is also important because the interests and actions of the main international actors like Russia, China and the US are converging, each of them with their own regional agenda. As such, the region has the potential to become a key scenario in the configuration of a new framework for interaction among these major powers of the twenty first century. Finally, the sharing of a border with Afghanistan makes Central Asia important for the EU and many of its Member States due to the current international efforts to stabilise the country.

Consequently, Brussels is seeking to strengthen its role in the region. Currently, the EU suffers from a lack of weight and political visibility in Central Asia despite the fact that it has been one of its major donors and has started important programs since it gained independence more than fifteen

years ago. Therefore its capacity to exercise influence does not match its level of involvement, greatly limiting its potential.

This chapter analyses the EU's role in Central Asia and makes some recommendations to enhance it. The chapter first includes a chronological examination of the EU's involvement through the 1990s up to the adoption in 2007 of the EU's Strategy for Central Asia, which constitutes the most solid attempt to date to strengthen Brussels' role in the region. Second, the paper provides an assessment of the main elements of this Strategy, followed by a critical evaluation of the EU's perspectives and actions. This task is fulfilled bearing in mind the regional geopolitical context, a context which the Strategy itself lacks. Within this geopolitical context, the chapter then makes an evaluation of the areas in which the interests of Brussels in matters of energy resources, security and stability, are compatible or diverge with the interests of the other main actors in the region. Finally, in the last section, the chapter explores some of the EU's comparative advantages to strengthen its presence in the region in comparison to other actors.

First approaches: from 1990s assistance programs to the New Strategy

Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union the European Union, other than recognising the independence of the Central Asian republics, did not show any particular interest in the region. Comparatively speaking, the EU's interest was certainly smaller than that shown by the rest of the Eastern European and former Soviet countries. The EU opened a first delegation in Kazakhstan in 1994 and later just two small offices in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In the case of Tajikistan, the EU was involved in its civil war resolution and the provision of humanitarian aid through the European Commission Humanitarian Office's (ECHO) delegation opened in Dushanbe. The European Commission opened a 'Europe House' in Tashkent

with no diplomatic status, which acts as an unofficial liaison. To date, there is no EU representation in Turkmenistan, which is managed directly from Brussels. Germany, by contrast, pursued an active engagement with the region during this period, opening embassies in all five countries and showing a strong interest in building partnerships. France was also quite active, especially on matters related to police reform and the potential implications of the Afghan conflict for the region.

The Central Asian republics were included in the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) programme, launched in 1991 to promote the transition to a market economy and reinforcing democracy and the rule of law in the partner States of the post-Soviet space. Brussels' approach towards former Soviet republics was strongly influenced by the 'paradigm of transition', assuming that all post-Soviet states were turning into market economies and democracies.

Apart from assisting the transition, one of the main goals of EU policy in Central Asia was the creation of transport corridors connecting the post-Soviet space with Europe. The Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) and Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE) programmes were launched to develop and rehabilitate the infrastructures for the transportation of oil, gas and other goods. At the end of the 90s Brussels signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with the states of Central Asia with the main aim of promoting economic development and to harmonise trade relations. The PCAs signed with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan entered into force in 1999 for a period of ten years. The PCAs negotiated with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan were signed in 1998 and 2004 respectively, but they are yet to enter into force. The latter one was delayed by the civil war, while the procedures of ratification of the Turkmen PCA are frozen. These PCAs were a first attempt to build a stable and fruitful framework for the EU-Central Asia relationship but they are more focused on economic and technical questions, hence "in the absence of clear goalposts it is hard to regard PCAs as a tangible political framework towards which to work" (Matveeva, 2006, p.85).

The events of 2001 were a turning point in the way the EU viewed the region. With the beginning of the International Campaign in Afghanistan, Central Asia acquired a brand new geostrategic relevance. European troops were spread out among the territories of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan provided rights to their air spaces. In light of these events, the region was increasingly perceived as a critical element for global security.

European concerns also grew as the region was increasingly considered a source of serious potential threats that could affect the EU's own security directly. As a result, the EU adopted a comprehensive security approach, which focused mainly on issues considered of critical concern for Central Asian republics with a potential bearing on the European Union itself such as border security or drug trafficking flows. To this end, the EU set up the Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) to ensure effectiveness in border management and the Central Asia Drug Program (CADAP) to prevent and reduce drug trafficking and drug-related problems affecting health and society. For the European Union these programmes "represent the practical expression of the EU's strategic interest in supporting the security and stability of the Central Asian region".

In 2004 with the incorporation of ten new members from Central and Eastern Europe and the inclusion of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) countries into the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Central Asia moved closer to the European interest and sphere of influence ('the neighbours of our neighbours').

At this point, the EU recognises that the outcome of TACIS, while beneficial in general, fell rather short of expectations. Despite the time and resources invested, making the EU one of the biggest donors in the region, its involvement has had little effect in terms of the transformation of the region or in terms of the increase of its influence and visibility. There are several reasons for this lack of success. Firstly, the chosen regional approach was in theory very reasonable, but in practice proved rather ineffective, and it met with resistance from Central Asian regimes unprepared for regional

cooperation. Secondly, there was a shortage of clear mechanisms suitable for the region. But probably the main reason was the absence of a clear voice and defined political objectives. Consequently, in July 2005, the European Council appointed an EU Special Representative (EUSR) to Central Asia to enhance EU effectiveness and visibility.

The gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine in January 2006 increased the fears of several members concerning the Union's reliance on hydrocarbons coming from the Russian Federation. The EU's response to this crisis reflected the importance that the Central Asian region had come to play as one of its strategic interests. The crisis led to an active search for new energy sources and resource supply routes resulting in the emergence of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as two key elements. The Caspian states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were viewed as potential additional suppliers of oil and gas as part of a new European strategy aimed at diversifying its energy supplies and reduce its dependence on Russia.

In this context, the EU came to realise the need to devise a strategic document to guide and strengthen its role in the region. The presidency of Germany, the traditional engine of European policies in the region, gave a considerable impulse to the development of relations between the Union and the states of the Central Asia. The result of this was the endorsement of two new EU strategic documents: the "European Community Strategy Paper for Assistance to Central Asia for the Period 2007-2013" and "The EU and Central Asia: Strategy for a New Partnership". The latter presents the EU's attempt to develop a comprehensive and long-vision approach with political aims in Central Asia.

The Strategy for a New Partnership: a first step towards a coherent EU action in Central Asia

In the Strategy, the EU identifies security and stability as its strategic areas of focus in the region for the following reasons:

- “Strategic, political and economic developments as well as increasing trans-regional challenges in Central Asia have a direct or indirect impact on EU interests
- With EU enlargement, the inclusion of the Southern Caucasus into the ENP and the Black Sea Synergy Initiative, Central Asia and the EU are moving closer together;
- Significant energy resources in Central Asia and the region’s aim to diversify trade partners and supply routes can help meet EU energy security and supply needs”.

The European approach to the first goal –security and stability– is comprehensive. The EU wants to see “a peaceful, democratic and economically prosperous Central Asia” believing these aims are interrelated. At the same time, the nature of the non-traditional threats facing the EU and Central Asia leads to shared interests and goals.

Moreover, to help Central Asia move in the right direction, the EU is willing to share its experience and expertise in key areas such as good governance, the rule of law, human rights, democratisation and education. This approach is based on the assumption that the rule of law, good governance, human rights and transparent democratic political structures create the conditions of stable political frameworks and economic prosperity. The strategy envisions such instruments as:

- a regular regional political dialogue at Foreign Minister level;
- a ‘European Education Initiative’ and support of Central Asian countries in the development of an ‘e-silk-highway’;
- an ‘EU Rule of Law Initiative’;
- a regular, result-focused ‘Human Rights Dialogue’ with each of the Central Asian states.

In order to promote economic development, the EU will support the removal of trade barriers among the Central Asian states and it will try to improve access for Central Asian products to EU markets through the renewed EU Generalised System of Preferences. In addition, the EU will continue to support WTO accession of the four Central Asian states (Kyrgyzstan

is already a WTO member). The main objectives behind the EU approach are market upgrades, economic diversification and integration of Central Asia into the world trade and economic systems.

Furthermore, the EU wants to conduct a regular energy dialogue with Central Asian states within the framework of the Baku Initiative, to pursue the integration of Central Asian hydrocarbon reserves into the European energy system bypassing Russia. The EU will lend political support and assistance to Central Asian countries to develop a new Caspian Sea – Black Sea – EU energy transport corridor. The issue of supply is interconnected with the issue of sustainability, which requires energy efficiency and transparency of the energy sector.

One of the main issues for concern in the EU's assistance policy towards Central Asia was the ineffectiveness of its excessive insistence on regional approaches and regional programmes. The new strategy, by contrast, stresses bilateral cooperation and introduces more tailored policies that acknowledge significant differences among the Republics. The assistance programme for the period 2007-2013 defines the priorities for cooperation with each Central Asian state, taking into account their specific needs, requirements and performance. At the same time, it continues to maintain its regional approach in areas of comprehensive security (such as organised crime, drugs and arms trafficking, terrorism, non-proliferation, energy, environmental pollution, water management, migration), where it is most appropriate. For this new period, the former TACIS has been replaced by the new Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI).

The Strategy focuses mainly on contributing to the improvement of educational systems in the region and the implementation of the European Education Initiative for Central Asia. This initiative has the main aim of providing for “the adaptation of the education systems of Central Asian States to the needs of a globalised world” and it aims to cover cooperation ranging from primary school to higher education. The EU envisions a virtual network linking its educational systems with Central Asian systems and to promote academic and student exchanges. No doubt, education of

the new generations can be considered one of the most effective tools to ensure a positive development in the area. The democratisation and development of Central Asia will only be consolidated if these are the result of inner processes.

Assessing the EU's approach: incentives and constraints for a greater engagement

A first critical analysis of the European strategy reveals the surprising absence of any consideration of the regional geopolitical context, which is extremely complex and dynamic as the interests and actions of the major global actors converge on Central Asia.

As the previous chapters pointed out, since the collapse of the Soviet Union the region has drawn the attention of several external actors, each having their own agenda. The weakness of Russia and the ambiguity of its foreign policy towards Central Asia during the 1990s, and the desire of the Central Asian republics to reject Russian tutelage, have allowed the appearance of other great powers in the region, namely the USA, China, Turkey, Japan, India, Pakistan, Iran and the EU. This confluence of interests has resulted in a competitive dynamic, especially concerning energy resources. In this sense, the incorporation of Central Asia into World politics has been often labelled as the "new great game".

The lack of a geopolitical context in the European strategy, as well as an analysis of the interests and actions of other external actors, poses important questions about the viability of the strategy. The EU cannot ignore the role that great powers such as Russia and China play in the region, and in the core strategies and national interests of Central Asian states, as this role could limit the EU's political objectives (democratisation, education, energy, etc.) for the region. Hence the EU must clearly define its position within the broader geopolitical context and its strategy in dealing with regional dynamics in order to develop its own agenda. This is a necessary

step to move beyond the previous European approach and to change its perceived image as a mere aid donor. A clearer definition of the EU's position does not imply the need to become a new great power, but suggests the need to understand that a clear political will and matching course of action are imperative to strengthen ties with Central Asia. This is a crucial step to ensure the effectiveness of the EU's comprehensive approach and to achieve its main goals.

Therefore the EU must clearly define which place it seeks for Central Asia within its own foreign policy and, more importantly, within the broader international political context. The lack of such a cohesive policy remains the biggest weakness of the EU's approach and sets it apart from the strategies of the rest of the great powers. This does not necessarily imply that the EU should behave as an actor with clear a geopolitical agenda in the more traditional way. However, the EU needs to understand China's designs for a Central Asian region more integrated with the Xinjiang region through economic synergies, or Russia's hopes for some kind of reintegration for its own benefit in what still considers its backyard. In both cases, Central Asia is perceived mainly as a supplier of raw materials, while providing the region with access to global markets through the Chinese and Russian markets. In addition, the USA has plans for a Greater Central Asia, a region comprised by the five Central Asian republics plus Afghanistan and Pakistan. This geographical combination would mean the possible link between Central Asia and world markets through Gwadar port in Pakistan.

By contrast, the EU does not have such a clear vision for the region. Its only clear intention is to set up the South Caucasus energy corridor and this plan remains quite an uncertain option in terms of its real impact both for the EU and for the Central Asian energy sectors. In any case, this falls short of providing the conditions to achieve the comprehensive goals set for the region. Furthermore, it should be considered also that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Member States include Central Asia in either its European department or Asian one. In both cases, Central Asia, ironically, is

always a peripheral area which contradicts the rhetoric of closeness and shared security threats employed in the strategy. As a commentator pointed out “the EU needs to begin to think comprehensively about Eurasia as a whole” (Melvin & Boonstra, 2008, p.9).

Furthermore, the EU has its own internal constraints that pose difficulties for any attempts to define a clear and unified agenda. A clear example is the place that Central Asia holds in the different foreign policies of the various Member States which has resulted in an inconsistency of action as a consequence of the EU’s six-month presidency cycle. This lack of a unified action is coupled with a lack of specific mechanisms and policies to achieve the strategy’s goals.

The sum of all these difficulties promotes the EU’s self-perception of weakness. However, it can be argued that the EU already has at its disposal the tools to strengthen its political and strategic position in Central Asia. For example, the EU is a clear source of models for modernisation and sustainable development in Central Asia. In addition, its comprehensive approach to security is probably the most beneficial for the region. The EU advocates cooperation rather than competition, in clear contrast to the approaches of the other external actors in the region. Therefore, EU’s activity in Central Asia could partially ease the atmosphere of the ‘new great game’. These comparative advantages for the EU will be later discussed in further detail, but considering all of them, it can be proposed a policy approach to the EU which can be summarised as ‘no delegation, no confrontation’, not taking the wait-and-see position in Central Asia and not antagonizing the others, but instead promoting its own vision. That is why it is crucial that the EU defines its position and interests clearly and attempts to point out which devices are compatible among the others actors’ agendas and which ones are not, in order to effectively attract them to its strategic focus.

The following two sections attempt to apply this proposed approach to some of the most crucial issues in its regional agenda: energy, and stability and democracy promotion.

The Great Powers and energy resources in Central Asia: options for the EU

The main external actor in matters of energy resources is Russia, who benefits from the interdependence in the energy sector inherited from the Soviet period and, moreover, takes advantage of the vulnerability of the Central Asian republics to apply pressure (not only regarding energy issues). Almost all the hydrocarbon production of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is exported through the Russian pipeline system to the Black sea and Europe. In the absence of alternative routes, Russia has taken advantage of this situation by paying extremely low prices for these hydrocarbons while reselling it at international prices in European markets. Hence new export routes are at the heart of Central Asian republics' strategic interests.

The EU's situation is rather more complex and its dependence on Russia requires some clarification. Russia constitutes 25% of the EU's total natural gas imports and 30% of its total oil imports. The supply of natural gas is the most problematic, because unlike oil, which is easier to transport and has a broad world market, it is extremely complex and expensive to have new suppliers and supply routes for natural gas, regardless it is through pipeline or in LNG form. However, this affects Member States very differently and, especially in terms of natural gas supplies, these states can be put into three categories. First, those states such as Spain, Portugal, Ireland, the UK or the Netherlands, whose imports of Russian natural gas never exceed 15% of the total, rendering their dependence low. Second, states such as France, Italy or Germany with a higher level of dependency, averaging between 20% and 40% of Russian supplies. Last, states with a high level of dependency such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary or Poland with 50% of Russian natural gas imports, or those with a total dependency such as Finland, Latvia or Lithuania with Russia being virtually their only supplier of natural gas. All estimates point to an increase in the EU's energy imports from Russia in the next few decades, coinciding with an increase in the

dependence on imported hydrocarbons. The European Commission has predicted that the level of dependence on external supply could grow to 94% for oil imports and 84% for natural gas by 2030.

This situation is of great concern at a time when relations with Russia are at an all-time low due to, among other things, mutual distrust on energy related issues. The liberalisation of the European gas market has coincided with a process of re-nationalisation of the energy sector in Russia and an attempt to use energy resources as “a vehicle for projecting power” (Gomart, 2008, p. 10). As such, the EU feels a lack of reciprocity on the part of Russia in a preferred liberalised market environment. This growing mistrust has hindered the ratification of the transport protocol to the European Energy Charter between the EU and Russia, and the adoption of measures such as the so-called ‘Gazprom clause’ as a response to Russia’s refusal to open its energy market to foreign investment and its growing assertiveness in its foreign policies.

Consequently, the EU and Central Asian states wish to reduce their level of dependency on Moscow, building infrastructures that bypass Russia, such as the South Caucasus corridor. However, this option has little hope for success and its strategic impact is quite uncertain. On one hand, the light political weight of the EU reduces significantly the possibilities for a project that needs a strong political impulse in the rather unstable and volatile region of the South Caucasus, a circumstance that discourages big investment initiatives. Moreover, Central Asian states are quite vulnerable to Russian pressure. On the other hand, the real strategic impact of such a project remains far from clear. Even in the best-case scenario (the Nabucco pipeline is built and used for Turkmen and Kazakh natural gas production) this route would be of marginal relevance to EU supplies. While the European demand for natural gas is projected to reach 550 bcm per annum, this route is unlikely to have the capacity to provide much more than 20 bcm annually.

There are other elements of great relevance to the EU-Russia resource context that are often underestimated. Hence, the ‘European dependency’ beco-

mes more of an energy interdependence if we take into account that 85% of Russian natural gas exports are destined for the European market, representing 75% of the total income for energy exports. This interdependence is strengthened by the already existing infrastructures, because Russia's only accessible big market via pipeline at the moment is the European one. However, Russia takes advantage of European internal dissensions to maximise its capacity for pressuring, especially concerning the Member States which depend completely in the Russian supply and which represent, at the same time, a small percentage of all Russian exports to the EU. It is worth bearing in mind also that the main risk for both Russia and the EU is related to a hypothetical shortage of natural gas availability due to a lack of investment for the development of new fields in Russia. Thus, the articulation of a unified policy and a common voice on energy resources on the part of the EU constitutes Brussels' best negotiating leverage in energy matters with Russia

While Russia might be perceived as a 'difficult partner' for the EU, their level of interdependence makes it impossible for both to ignore each other. This highlights the need for a cooperative framework covering the Eurasian region as a whole. Such a multilateral dialogue for energy might seem unrealistic in the current context, especially after the conflict over South Ossetia, but it remains the most appropriate option to ensure stability and energy security in Eurasia.

The case of China offers a different set of circumstances as, to some extent, its interests overlap with those of the European Union. China is becoming increasingly involved in the Central Asian energy sector through large investments in the development of Kazakh fields and infrastructure, and through ambitious plans to build new pipelines connecting Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan with China via Xinjiang. To date, the most visible example of this is the construction of Kenkiyak-Atyrau and Atasu-Alashankou pipelines. A third pipeline is currently under construction, and it will allow the integration of these three sections, making possible the transportation of hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea all the way to China. This infrastructure could also be used to deliver oil from Russia's Siberian fields.

Consequently, as more oil and gas will be transported from Central Asia to China, less will be available for European and Russian markets. The confluence of European and Chinese interests (as well as the rest of eastern Asia) on Central Asian resources could have negative consequences for both China and the EU, given that an increase in demand and competition for supplies can result in a considerable rise in prices.

However, in spite of this overlapping, European involvement is welcomed by China due to Beijing's perception that the EU could contribute to end the Russian hegemonic role in the Central Asian energy sector. In general terms, "China wants to prevent Russia from treating the region as its 'backyard'" (Shao, 2008, p.20). In addition, there is a shared interest between the EU and China to develop the local energy sector as another step to ensure Central Asian stability and development. Therefore the establishment of a dialogue on energy issues with Beijing would be advisable since Brussels cannot avoid Chinese involvement and there are grounds for cooperation.

At the same time, Russia is anxious about China's growing role in the region because China has the potential to jeopardise its hegemonic position. These concerns are another element that can strengthen the EU's position in negotiations with Moscow. It must be noted that the current situation in the South Caucasus makes Chinese involvement even easier and faster. Kazakhstan (and Kyrgyzstan) share Russian fears about China. The Sino-Kazakh relationship is growing as fast as feelings of anxiety in Astana about Chinese economic, political and military potential. The new export routes to an energy-hungry China are positive step to reduce Kazakhstan's dependence on Russian ones, but at the same time it encourages these fears about China's growing role in the most strategical sector of the Kazakh economy. Last but not least, European markets are by far the most profitable for export countries like Russia and Kazakhstan. Thus it can be concluded that the EU has some advantageous conditions to interact with Russia and China in Central Asia.

Lastly, in relation to the USA, the EU must seriously analyse the implications of the already mentioned Greater Central Asia Partnership project

(GCA) regarding energy issues. In its Strategy for Central Asia, the EU gives some support for the development of the hydroelectric potential of Tajikistan within the framework of the GCA, for example with the inclusion of Afghanistan. The EU must be very prudent in dealing with matters related to water management as this is one of the most likely sources of tension among Central Asian republics. Furthermore, it seems evident that the project to build a Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–(India) pipeline is of little interest to Brussels.

The Great Powers and Stability in Central Asia: options for the EU's democracy promotion

The promotion of democracy and human rights has been one of the most controversial issues in the EU's action in Central Asia. Brussels is yet to resolve the dilemma of how to promote reforms while seeking to guarantee the current stability and strengthen the links with the region's governments in order to have access to energy resources. All Central Asian regimes are, to a higher or lesser degree, of an authoritarian nature. This means an environment conditioned by the lack of political freedom, human rights violations, widespread corruption and growing social inequalities. The most purist within the EU, demand Brussels to apply sanctions and adopt a hard line. However, this approach, while legitimate, is completely inefficient for several reasons. First of all, given the geopolitical context already analysed, the Central Asian Republics can avoid excessive pressure on matters of democracy and human rights by strengthening their ties with Russia and China, who are less likely to impose any conditionalities of this kind in their relations with the region. At the same time, isolating Central Asia will not resolve regional problems, but aggravate them in an environment in which the EU will only be able to influence effectively local political systems with a solid presence in the areas of security and energy. Lastly, it must be noted that there are no viable alter-

native actors to governments in the region, therefore “there is no way to engage Central Asia effectively without engaging Central Asian governments” (Kimmagine, 2007, p.4).

This is not to suggest that the EU should forget issues of democratisation and human rights in the interest of access to resources. However, accepting that the EU cannot democratise Central Asia alone or in a short period of time, the best alternative is to adopt a gradual, less dogmatic approach to these issues, while at the same time attempt to include Russia and China into its comprehensive and reformist approach as much as possible.

Russia, China, the USA and the EU all agree on the need for a stable and peaceful Central Asian region. However, there are deep disagreements about the best way to achieve this. China and Russia strongly advocate an active defence of the status quo of authoritarian regimes, while the USA and especially the EU, consider imperative the introduction of reforms and the opening of the local political space to guarantee medium and long-term stability.

The Russian and Chinese argument in favour of these authoritarian regimes is out of pragmatism rather than due to favourable ideological reasons. Both share the belief that in the absence of the current regimes, power might fall in the hands of Islamic extremist groups. Not only do they consider unlikely any potential consolidation of democratic regimes in Central Asia, but this prospect is not viewed as an attractive alternative. For Russia and China, a democratic Central Asian region would result in a stronger Western orientation and, consequently, a distancing in relations with its closer neighbours.

The EU shares the concern for the Islamist challenge, but contends that repressive regimes guarantee only a fragile stability and, in reality, worsen the context in which radical Islamic influences can take hold and strengthen. These kind of regimes cannot deal effectively with the non-conventional security threats and challenges facing the region. The most important of these challenges are related to institutional weakness due to bad governance.

Therefore, the EU’s comprehensive approach seems the most appropriate to guarantee medium and long-term stability and security in the region,

despite resistance from local autocrats. From a conceptual perspective the problem lies in the fact that for these regimes national-security is a quite narrow term understood in a very traditional and conventional way. In addition, when aspects of new security thinking are incorporated, as for instance Kazakhstan does, an old State-centred approach to deal with new threats and risks is kept.

But this State-centred security approach has the main aim, and sometimes exclusively, of ensuring the current regimes. This could provoke a disaster in the medium and long-term. The EU must convince Russia and China that local authoritarian regimes do not represent a real guarantee of stability. It is just a mirage of stability in the short term. In Uzbekistan the main risk is the regime itself, not only because it is extremely repressive in nature, which makes it the main threat to the local population, but also because it is impossible to predict what will happen after Karimov. Currently Uzbekistan lacks the mechanisms and the legitimacy needed to guarantee a smooth power transition and any scenario is possible without the current president, including armed conflicts and the emergence of ungoverned spaces. However, the fear of a power vacuum should not serve as justification for supporting the Karimov regime unconditionally. Instead there is a need to move toward the consolidation of a legitimate and more effective State. It should also be noted, that the great powers have a degree of responsibility with regards to bad governance in Central Asia given that competition among them allows local authoritarian regimes to survive without adopting the necessary reforms. Therefore Brussels must convince Russia and China that its democratising approach is the most effective, not in ethical or ideological terms, but as a mechanism to ensure the stability and development of Central Asia.

At the same time, as other observers have pointed out, the best option for Brussels would be the implementation of a 'democratisation and good governance initiative' in which Central Asian leaders can understand that the aim of the EU "is increasing accountability and transparency but also effectiveness of governance –and thereby promoting security and stability-

and that the EU is not in the business of regime-change” (Melvin & Boons-tra, 2008, p.4). Therefore, it is crucial that processes of democratisation are not mixed in any way with geopolitical interests or designs by external actors.

Such an approach would allow the EU to provide not only expertise but also legitimacy. While current leaders might be able to manage without Brussels, it is likely that a new generation of leaders might need to resort to Brussels, as the external actor better positioned for this purpose, to gain the legitimacy they need.

The EU includes the development of educational systems among its priorities for the region, which reflects the coherence of its approach rather than any perceived weakness on Brussels’ part. A successful democratisation process must be an indigenous initiative. Therefore the next two generations become the critical element in this process. The support for local educational systems can be considered one of the most effective tools for promoting local development and future stability. In this sense the implementation of the European Education Initiative and the various university grant schemes and exchange programs are crucial. But the EU should be very careful with the growing gap between a section of the population with very high education levels and a majority without access to quality elementary and secondary schooling. Not to mention the risk posed by the weakness of the state and even its absence in certain rural areas, allowing for informal educational systems to penetrate, such as Pakistan’s madrassas, or private institutions financed by Persian Gulf countries with ideas incompatible with democracy and democratic values.

The EU’s comparative advantages in relation to other actors

As has been pointed out above, the EU must identify where its interests and action coincide and where they diverge with those of the other external actors in order to ensure the greatest efficiency of its policies. At the same

time, the EU must be aware of its own comparative advantage vis-à-vis these actors to maximise its action. Despite being perceived as a weak actor in Central Asia with little hope for success, even within the EU itself, the reality is that the EU possesses certain significant comparative advantages to strengthen its position drawing the Central Asian republics into its comprehensive approach.

Firstly, it should be mentioned that EU's presence is generally welcomed by both governments and opposition groups in Central Asian region. In this sense, Kazakhstan is a major example. The president Nazarbayev launched recently the programme "The Path to Europe for 2009-2011" which seeks to upgrade the relationship with Member States like United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy or Spain to the level of 'strategic partnership'. This link is considered from a broad perspective including development and links in technology transfer, transport, trade, education, legal reforms, civil society, transport fields, and so on. And although we should be cautious with the viability of the document as "many of the initiatives outlined in the Programme are unlikely to ever see the light of day". It should not be underestimated its relevance as "a statement of political ambition [...] it represents a significant development in Kazakhstan's domestic and international evolution" (Kassenova & Melvin, 2008, p.4). At the same time, it should be pointed out that political opposition has a clear pro-European orientation, since the EU is perceived as a more ideal model to guarantee the sustainable development, democracy, and even the own sovereignty and independence of the country.

Likewise, it should be kept in mind that the desire of strengthening the ties with the EU is sustained somehow with Kazakhstan's sense of European identity. In addition, in 2010 Kazakhstan will hold the Chair of the OSCE. For Astana this is a real milestone and it is understood as the definite international legitimisation of the Republic. At the same time, it is seen as a great opportunity to strengthen its ties with Brussels.

This context provides the EU with an excellent opportunity to upgrade its role in the country, at a time when Kazakhstan is increasingly consolida-

ting its leadership in the region. Thus, the strengthening of ties, incorporating Kazakhstan into the European Neighbourhood Policy, could have a considerable impact on the region as a whole.

Secondly, it is worth noting that while the EU seems to lament at times not being perceived as a geopolitical actor, this in itself serves to facilitate its access to the region. This is due to the fact that the EU is understood to lack a 'hidden geopolitical agenda', which in turn generates trust and grants the EU a higher level of legitimacy. And, as mentioned above, this greater legitimacy will likely be of great relevance to the next generation of local leaders.

Furthermore, this legitimacy is enhanced by the fact that the EU is the only actor that attempts to harmonise its approach and explore the regional needs and demands to shape its focus. And this approach takes into consideration both governments, opposition as population in general. The EU should not waste the political and diplomatic advantages derived from this practice –with both official and non-official actors-. On the one hand, despite the absence of political conditionality Russia and China consider Central Asian republics as a 'junior partners' and at the same time they exert a great pressure on their economical and geopolitical independence. On the other hand, the demands of the local human rights activists to European institutions, while completely legitimate, are at times surprisingly harsh in their criticisms and lack clear and realistic proposals for a more efficient EU action. Therefore the EU's approach is definitely something Brussels must 'sell' better, and must also be valued accordingly by the local actors.

It must be noted that the EU is the only actor actively promoting economic diversification in Central Asia. Contrary to other actors, Brussels does not want the role of the region to be limited to that of resource supplier. The EU, therefore, shares the view of regional leaders such as Nazarbayev who aspire to see Central Asia become the subject rather than the object of its destiny and as a result, the EU's involvement is beneficial for regional economies.

At the same time, the EU is the only actor that strongly supports regional cooperation and integration. Contrary to Russia and China, the EU

believes that a strong and autonomous Central Asian region forms part of its own strategic interest, while the USA privileges bilateral relations to any potential Central Asian multilateral forum.

Many commentators feel that such a regional focus is not an advantage, rather a disadvantage for the EU as past years' results appear to show. Similarly, this emphasis on regional cooperation tends to raise suspicions among local actors who tend to highlight the existing differences and lack of trust among Central Asian Republics making difficult any kind of structured cooperation. However, it is easy to argue that there are probably more similarities between, for example, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan than between Finland and Spain or Greece and Luxemburg. Moreover, it is questionable to what extent the existing antipathies and suspicions between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could be compared to those between France and Germany, who in the twentieth century alone fought two devastating wars. In any case, the debate over similarities is ultimately futile and irrelevant. What the Republics must assess is the degree of necessity and advantages to be gained from an efficient regional cooperation, apart from the possible complementarities. There are, for example, urgent questions such as water management that can only be effectively solved with a regional perspective as it affects the interests and the security of the five Republics. Furthermore, all Central Asian countries face common challenges: Islamic extremism and terrorism along the southern border, inability to compete with China or their dependency of Russia to guarantee their security. Thus, in order not to become mere raw material suppliers and dependent states, the Central Asian Republics must bolster their options including through regional cooperation; a process in which, as it is argued, the EU is one of the most attractive partners for the region.

Lastly, the EU does not endorse a competitive dynamic and it is the only actor that wishes for a cooperative and integrated Central Asia to strengthen the region, reduce its dependency levels and avoid the consolidation of a new 'cold war' dynamic. The agendas of Brussels and the Central Asian capitals fully coincide on this point.

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