

**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION  
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

**Stephen J. Blank**

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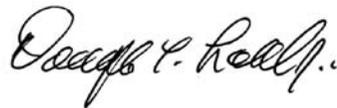
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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Douglas E. Raloff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'R'.

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## FOREWORD

President Obama has outlined a comprehensive strategy for the war in Afghanistan which is now the central front of our campaign against Islamic terrorism. The strategy strongly connects our prosecution of that war to our policy in Pakistan and internal developments there as a necessary condition of victory. But the strategy has also provided for a new logistics road through Central Asia.

In this monograph, Dr. Stephen Blank argues that a winning strategy in Afghanistan depends as well upon the systematic leveraging of the opportunity provided by that road and a new coordinated nonmilitary approach to Central Asia. That approach would rely heavily on improved coordination at home and the more effective leveraging of our superior economic power in Central Asia to help stabilize the region so that it provides a secure rear to Afghanistan. In this fashion we would help Central Asia meet the challenges of extremism, of economic decline due to the global economic crisis, and thus help provide political stability in states that are likely to be challenged by the confluence of those trends.

This timely monograph contributes directly to the debate on U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and Central Asia in the hope that policymakers will find it informative and useful, and those who may be called upon to implement the policy will be able to do so more effectively.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute





## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

STEPHEN J. BLANK has served as the Strategic Studies Institute's expert on the Soviet bloc and the post-Soviet world since 1989. Prior to that he was Associate Professor of Soviet Studies at the Center for Aerospace Doctrine, Research, and Education, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, and taught at the University of Texas, San Antonio, TX, and at the University of California, Riverside, CA. Dr. Blank is the editor of *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Position in Asia*, coeditor of *Soviet Military and the Future*, and author of *The Sorcerer as Apprentice: Stalin's Commissariat of Nationalities, 1917-1924*. He has also written many articles and conference papers on Russian, Commonwealth of Independent States, and Eastern European security issues. Dr. Blank's current research deals with proliferation and the revolution in military affairs, and energy and security in Eurasia. His two most recent books are *Russo-Chinese Energy Relations: Politics in Command*, London: Global Markets Briefing, 2006; and *Natural Allies?: Regional Security in Asia and Prospects for Indo-American Strategic Cooperation*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2005. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Pennsylvania, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in History from the University of Chicago.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

### **Introduction: The Three Linked Challenges to U.S. Policy.**

The Obama administration has taken office while Central Asia undergoes at least three linked, concurrent, and major crises. In Afghanistan the situation is deteriorating. In September 2008, the British ambassador to Kabul, Sherard Cowper-Coles, called U.S. strategy “destined to fail.” He decried the worsening security and corruption situation, argued that foreign forces are an integral part of the problem in Afghanistan, and concluded that the only realistic outcome was an “acceptable dictator” for Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> This pessimism and the sober assessment of the situation are widely shared. Other reports have depicted a gradually tightening Taliban noose around Kabul and the growing presence of the Taliban across the country.<sup>2</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Bush White House both issued reports or estimates in late 2008 echoing this pessimism and these findings.<sup>3</sup> Admiral Michael Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently reiterated his belief that the United States is not winning the war there.<sup>4</sup> Other top U.S. commanders have been even more specific. Furthermore, clearly top members of the Obama administration like Vice-President Joseph Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are demanding a tougher line with respect to corruption and misgovernment in Afghanistan and are quite disenchanted with the leadership of Afghan President Hamid Karzai.<sup>5</sup> A major policy review under the Bush administration had taken place in late 2008

and the Obama team undoubtedly will have conducted its own review by the time this report is published.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, the need for a new strategy that can produce victory in Afghanistan and stabilize Pakistan and Central Asia is visibly apparent. But it must necessarily be a long-term strategy entailing a long-term commitment of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and U.S. forces and resources. The U.S. Army is already preparing for this contingency.<sup>7</sup> Combatant Commander for U.S. Central Command General David H. Petraeus has said publicly that if we are to win there the United States and other states must make a “sustained, substantial” commitment to reversing the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. That commitment must also be extended to Pakistan. General Petraeus further noted that success in Afghanistan requires effective regional cooperation among its neighbors, including Iran, which has certain common interests in this war with the NATO coalition.<sup>8</sup> In other words, a successful strategy in regard to Afghanistan cannot stop at its borders or even at Pakistan’s borders. Rather, it must embrace the entire Central Asian world of which Afghanistan is an integral part.

At the same time General Bantz J. Craddock, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and thus the Commander in Chief of NATO forces in Afghanistan, also warned that the United States and its allies will need to keep large numbers of forces there for at least a decade and maintain a military presence for decades after that.<sup>9</sup>

General Craddock further linked the war in Afghanistan to the second major crisis roiling Central Asia, the global economic crisis, because that will strike at the financial capability and political will of allies to continue contributing to this war.<sup>10</sup> However,

General Craddock's assessment neglected the already strong negative impact of this crisis on Central Asia. The World Bank reported that Kazakhstan was likely to suffer "severe banking disruptions" in the near future and that sector is already shrinking even as global credit tightens, making it difficult for it or other states to recapitalize their financial sector by further borrowing.<sup>11</sup> Kazakhstan's growth rate will fall to 2 percent in 2009 while its unemployment will rise to 8 percent, according to Minister of Economy and Budget Planning Bakhyt Sultanov. It also is recalculating energy income based on a price of \$40/barrel for oil for 2009 and \$50 for 2010-11, so its growth will be severely diminished for at least 2 more years, cutting a third from expected revenues through 2011.<sup>12</sup> As of this writing, it has also devalued its currency, the Tenge. The crisis has also led Russia and Kazakhstan to deport thousands of migrants whose remittances comprised as much as an estimated 15-20 percent of the national incomes of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan's plight is even worse. In one province, Gorno-Badakhshan, remittances fell by half in the last quarter of 2008. Growth rates from Kazakhstan to Tajikistan have plummeted, unemployment is rising, and countries are relapsing into protectionism and in practice are curtailing efforts at regional cooperation.<sup>13</sup> Countries like Tajikistan that are excessively in debt to foreign lenders probably have no discernible means of paying them back. And countries like Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are thus replying with "beggar thy neighbor" policies towards weaker states like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Tajikistan has previously accused Uzbekistan of seeking to destabilize it by organizing an explosion near its supreme court.<sup>15</sup> Kyrgyzstan Minister for Development and Trade

Akylbek Japarov stated in November 2008, "Our state is effectively on the verge of the financial crisis," although he was reprimanded for saying so.<sup>16</sup> And the effects in one country then spread to another. As Kazakhstan began to suffer, it pulled out larger and larger amounts of its investments in Kyrgyzstan that amounted to 60 percent of that banks' basic assets, triggering the financial crisis, in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>17</sup>

As a result of this crisis, which accelerates dramatically from one day to the next in a deepening spiral of misery and suffering, massive geopolitical changes across the globe are likely to occur. And Central Asia is hardly immune to such upheavals. As Ian Bremmer, President of Eurasia Group, recently warned,

Sometimes the impact of geopolitical factors is substantial and at other times, it is more modest. But in the broadest context, we're entering a period in which political risk will matter more for the markets than in the recent past. . . . During 2009, political risk is especially dangerous because of the intense focus on the global financial crisis. Distracted markets are less likely to price in the risks linked to the international conflict over Iran's nuclear program, dangerous instability in Pakistan, Russia's assertive, even aggressive, foreign policy, and possible large-scale unrest in Iraq as various militia groups and others rush to fill the vacuum left by departing U.S. troops and to control that country's oil.<sup>18</sup>

Those risk factors that exist in Central Asia are also palpably multiplying and should be factored into any regional assessment and risk analysis. The conjunction of the new economic crisis, the spillover effects of the war, and the precarious domestic situation in these countries could easily come together to open another front in the war against terrorism. Indeed, virtually

all the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries are raising their military budgets or are receiving military aid from Russia or the United States, even as their finances are becoming increasingly stretched.<sup>19</sup> Central Asian surveys show growing anger at official corruption and an ensuing profound alienation from local governments. The widespread repressions against religious organizations have also led to substantial resentment, particularly among younger residents (aged 18 to 30) who believe that “law enforcement agencies are not held properly accountable for their actions,” and can “operate with impunity even when they cause harm to innocent people.” Moreover, the economic crisis only adds to high rates of previously existing unemployment in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, particularly among the youth, always the incendiary element in society. Understandably these circumstances, particularly under worsening economic conditions, can cause an upheaval in key Central Asian states like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Uzbekistan, especially if the perception of government control weakens any further.<sup>20</sup> For example, Kyrgyzstan is taking no chances and has recently focused attention on one of the major Islamist challenges to the regime, the terrorist organization Hizb al-Tahrir (also known as Hizb ut-Tahrir).<sup>21</sup> In addition, the International Crisis Group recently stated that Tajikistan was on the verge of becoming a failing state.<sup>22</sup> The overall situation both globally and in the region (including Russia) deteriorates in an ever accelerating spiral from day-to-day.

Finally, the third problem, which is linked to the other two, is Russia’s determination to oust the United States from any military presence in Central Asia and to more fully subordinate the entire region to its dictates. Part of its motivation stems from the current crisis as

it is attempting to forge a ruble union and economic bloc among it and Central Asian states to shore up the ruble's value. But it has also done so to create an exclusive closed trading and economic bloc, not unlike Germany in the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, it seeks to consolidate a Eurasian Economic Community as a single economic space, i.e., a trade, customs, and ruble bloc, intensify energy cooperation with Kazakhstan to prevent it from cooperating further with China or the West, upgrade intelligence cooperation, intensify military-technical cooperation, i.e., linking plants in Central Asia back to the Russian defense industry, as in Soviet times, and create new joint instruments for collective action.<sup>24</sup>

More to the point, Russia both pressured and bribed Kyrgyzstan into ousting the United States from its base at Manas.<sup>25</sup> By doing so, it made clear its insistence on following through on President Dmitry Medvedev's insistence that Russia have privileged interests and relations with CIS members to the exclusion of all rivals. This demonstrates that Central Asian states' sovereignty and right of free choice of military partners is not important to Moscow when compared to its own imperial interests. It also shows that for all Russia's talk about a willingness to cooperate with Washington against terrorism, in fact Russia regards the preservation of its neo-imperial patrimony as more urgent a task than the defeat of terrorism.<sup>26</sup> In other words, Washington cannot take for granted the oft-voiced sentiment that Moscow really wants cooperation with Washington against terrorism in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This argument merely projects American ideas concerning what Russia's interests should be onto the Russian government and then plays them back to Washington audiences as if they were fact. Such mindless mirror-

imaging cannot serve as an adequate basis for policy or strategy, especially as it finds no basis in what Russian leaders do or say. Russia does seek cooperation on Afghanistan, but only after ensuring that its imperial requirements – which can only promote greater instability across the region – come first.<sup>27</sup>

As General Charles Callwell (Victorian England's leading theorist of small wars) wrote, "theory cannot be accepted as conclusive when practice points the other way."<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it appears that for all its talk of cooperation, Moscow actually fears that the United States and NATO are losing and therefore seeks a hedge against that outcome. Thus when President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, sensing the loss of support for him in Washington, approached Moscow about arms sales to Afghanistan, Russia replied affirmatively but stipulated that there must first be a prior political agreement between the two governments and that NATO and Russia must resume their dialogue broken during the war with Georgia.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Moscow's interests, not surprisingly, take precedence over fighting terrorism. What an agreement with the Karzai government and the Obama administration about Afghanistan might mean was hinted at by Sergei Rogov, director of the prestigious and well-connected Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada in Moscow. Speaking in Washington on January 13, 2009, he stated:

The only way to achieve some stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan is to invite Russia to join the IFOR (International Forces there more commonly known as ISAF – author). Russia should accept responsibility for Regional Economic Reconstruction Teams in [the] Northern provinces. Russian teams should be supported by security personnel. The key problem will be to include

Russia in the political decision-making mechanism on Afghanistan while Russia remains a non-member of NATO. A possible solution may be giving additional functions to the NATO-Russia Council, or creation of [a] special body with decision-making authority. The Soviet experience in Afghanistan makes Russia very unenthusiastic about another engagement in this county. It will demand an extra effort from the new US Administration.<sup>30</sup>

While Moscow may still have or profess to have an Afghanistan syndrome and will therefore not send troops to the area, such ideas and a division of Afghanistan into spheres of responsibility and a new Russian military presence there as a leverage point to insert itself into NATO raises so many objections that it is a nonstarter as an arguing point. Certainly this is not an acceptable foundation for cooperation with the United States on Afghanistan as it would only provide a basis for either unending or future conflict. Thus Moscow confirms Henry Kissinger's observation that the past conduct of Afghanistan's principal neighbors does not augur well for a policy of restraint, opposition to terrorism, and we might add, nonintervention in its politics.<sup>31</sup>

But Rogov's formula, plus Moscow's decision to send military aid to Afghanistan also suggest Russia's apprehension that the Taliban might win leaving it to confront that movement with no means of dealing with it politically or of insulating Central Asia from it. Indeed, clearly Moscow is making every effort to further enmesh Central Asian regimes in various forms of economic, trade, and defense integration that would preclude them from being able to act effectively in defense of their own sovereignty. Likewise, Moscow's abortive efforts to obtain Central Asian governments'

approval for its unilateral revisions of Georgia's borders in August 2008 represent another sign of its basic contempt for their sovereignty, something they all grasp. From the beginning of his tenure, Russian President Vladimir Putin's first priority, and one that remains the central foreign policy priority for Russia, is to establish an exclusive sphere of influence in the CIS and to revitalize the existing institutions of cooperation, or even create new ones in defense, intelligence sharing, and overall economic policy, including trade and energy.<sup>32</sup>

Thus as the dire situation in Afghanistan worsens, Central Asia, its strategic rear, is coming under ever greater pressure. Consequently, the Obama administration, even before it took office, faced difficult strategic issues as to the size and nature of the U.S. military response, e.g., whether it should be a conventional or counterinsurgency response. Obviously it confronts a seriously deteriorating situation before the administration has been able to formulate its strategy.<sup>33</sup> Now it must make those decisions even before it has a thoroughly well-conceived plan. Although the administration immediately confronts the most difficult questions of strategy and policy in Afghanistan, it also decided, even before President Obama's inauguration, to make Afghanistan its "highest priority" and to fashion a broad, comprehensive strategy for dealing with the war.<sup>34</sup> It evidently must devise a strategy to present by the time of the April 2009 NATO summit to garner further support from the members for yet greater and more long-term exertions.<sup>35</sup> It would be difficult to conceive of more inauspicious conditions for the prosecution of a war. Worse yet, as one senior U.S. military commander said about the Bush

administration, “We have no strategic plan. We never had one.” Thus President Obama has no time to think or even to rely on an existing strategy but must build one on the fly.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, any of these crises or a combination of them could lead to a disaster in Central Asia, even as the war and instability still occur in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The impact of a negative outcome to the war is obvious. But so, too, is the potential strategic impact of the regional economic-political crisis. That could lead to failing states, particularly in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and to an upheaval in Uzbekistan if a succession to President Islam Karimov occurs during the crisis. Tajikistan, in particular, is already close to being a failing state, an already poor and fragile country gripped by multiple pathologies including massive corruption, drugs, and poor governance. The threat of a failing state in Tajikistan not only involves the interests of the United States, Russia, Iran, and China, but also could spread throughout the rest of Central Asia. The advent of thousands of disenfranchised and unemployed young men in a time of economic crisis with nothing to do could certainly further undermine its shaky foundations, so it is not surprising that repression there has increased, e.g., Tajikistan’s recent outlawing of the Saudi brand of Islam, Salafist Islam, the version associated with al-Qaida or Kyrgyzstan’s outlawing of head scarves.<sup>37</sup>

Finally, the consequences of a subordination of Central Asia to Russia are equally unpalatable. Not only is this a recipe for perpetuation of the backwardness, autocratic governance, and poor administration that characterizes the region, it also is a recipe for upheaval because Russia cannot sustain its imperial dreams and can only try to do so by further subordinating Central

Asia to its neo-colonial interests, which entail the freezing of these pathologies in place. That can only lead in the foreseeable future to one or more upheavals there. And certainly Russian meddling in Afghanistan has long since shown us how beneficial it is to the region. Furthermore, allowing Russia to dictate terms to Central Asia also means consigning that region and Europe to unending dependency upon the tender mercies of the Russian gas (and oil) industry. Here again, we have seen, most notably in Ukraine but in actuality across Europe, how Moscow uses the energy weapon to impose political conditions, suborn foreign political leaders and institutions, and punish states and governments that do not respond to its desires.<sup>38</sup>

For all these reasons, the need for a regional strategy designed to reverse the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, stabilize Pakistan, and assist Central Asia is obvious. This monograph aims to provide at least some answers to the Central Asian piece of the puzzle. Both the war and the economic crisis are regional challenges that can only be resolved on that scale. As General Petraeus noted, "Indeed, Afghanistan and Pakistan have in many ways merged into a single problem set. And the way forward in Afghanistan is incomplete without a strategy that includes and assists Pakistan and involves India," as well as the northern Central Asian countries, China, and Russia.<sup>39</sup> Thus a strategy that focuses solely on Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India is only half-correct and doomed to insufficiency, if not failure. This becomes even clearer when we consider the danger of Indo-Pakistani tensions that could spill over into Central Asia. This threat level remains high as the crisis generated by the terrorist attack in Mumbai in November 2008 demonstrates. Further manifestations of crisis in Central Asia, even if it seems to be a distant and relatively peripheral area for U.S. interests, must

therefore engage serious U.S. attention, given the war in Afghanistan and the coinciding economic crisis. For these same reasons, the strategy for Central Asia (like that for Afghanistan and Pakistan or those parts of the overarching regional strategy for Central and South Asia) must be much more than a military strategy. As the crisis there is primarily economic-political in nature and only secondarily related to the progress of the operation in Afghanistan, it must be a strategy that is led by institutions other than the Defense Department. It must be an integrated strategy that comprehensively addresses Central Asian security in all its dimensions. Therefore that strategy must be holistic, one employing all the instruments of power: diplomatic, informational, military, and economic, to the challenges at hand. It must address issues such as water, economic causes of instability amid conditions of poor governance and rampant authoritarianism, trafficking in drugs, and so forth. This strategy must therefore bring together all the different government agencies working on these issues in Central Asia and support whatever possible coordinated private sector activities towards similar ends exist here and there.

As Admiral Mullen has said, the military cannot lead these overall multidimensional strategies, vital though its part may be. More money and personnel must be directed to the responsible civilian agencies involved in these strategies with the armed forces.<sup>40</sup> In this respect, Admiral Mullen merely echoes the counsel of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and a host of independent and congressional reports.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, the interagency and policymaking process must be revived and restored to provide for an integrated, coherent, and well-orchestrated strategy. As noted above, this has not been the case previously in Afghanistan. But it also has not

been the case in Central Asia and other places, e.g., Iraq and North Korea.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, it appears that something like a consensus is emerging that the United States is incapable of forging strategy for any existing crisis and certainly failed to do so under President Bush's direction.<sup>43</sup> Certainly the prior neglect of Central Asia and failure to devise a coherent strategy utilizing all our instruments of power in a coherent fashion has led to the defeats we have suffered and the two evictions from our bases.<sup>44</sup>

### **Challenge and Opportunity for the United States and NATO.**

Nevertheless, as the Chinese remind us, crisis denotes both challenge and opportunity. Therefore Central Asia presents the Obama administration not only with challenges but also with opportunities to forge exactly the kind of regional strategy that has been missing. The challenges are obvious: war in Afghanistan, Russian opposition to our presence, Indo-Pakistani tensions at a high level, and the impact of the global economic crisis. But opportunities are there as well. Indeed, to some degree, the signs of the current crisis are responsible for their presence. The U.S. Government has already indicated that it will increase the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, a program that accords with President Obama's campaign speeches.<sup>45</sup> At the same time NATO, including the United States, is negotiating with the Central Asian governments of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia to build an alternative and new supply road to Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> All the Central Asian states except Kyrgyzstan have agreed to transmit nonmilitary cargoes to Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup> As a result of General Petraeus' negotiations, this new supply road will be built along

with an expanded air corridor through Kazakhstan to this road's starting point. This road would traverse Russian air space and territory to go to these countries, and supplies would then go over land to Afghanistan. Another alternative is to start on Georgia's coast, go through it and Azerbaijan by rail, and load the supplies on ships through the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan, from where they would be transported by rail to Termez in Uzbekistan and then down the road through Tajikistan to Afghanistan.<sup>48</sup> Logistically, the advantage of either alternative is that they bypass the Khyber Pass that has become the scene of numerous Taliban attacks that have on occasion interdicted supply convoys and put the road at risk.<sup>49</sup>

There are other reasons beyond the danger to the Khyber Pass road for this new road project. This virtual doubling of the U.S. footprint in Afghanistan will entail a commensurate increase in food, fuel, lumber, concrete, and other construction materials. Afghanistan's primitive infrastructure also makes the cost of supporting forces much more than in Iraq. Therefore the U.S. Government and military need a faster tempo of supplies and a bigger route, not to mention an alternative route to the Khyber Pass, where it can count on a secure logistical rear. The plan for the road involves all the Central Asian states serving either as a hub like Kazakhstan or as conduits and producers of goods for the road like Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Thus General Petraeus' talks in Kazakhstan involved discussions about expanding the use of the Almaty airport and Kazakhstan's participation in the expansion of logistical supply to Afghanistan. But he also seems to have accepted, possibly as a quid pro quo, that the objective is not just preventing the "escalation of extremism" in Afghanistan, but also reducing drug

smuggling from there, a key interest of all Central Asian states and Russia.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, in Turkmenistan his talks also touched on nonmilitary aspects of security like education.<sup>51</sup> The plan for the road also calls for buying a considerable amount of supplies locally from Central Asian countries that, as suppliers and transit states, stand to make considerable amounts of money from this venture.<sup>52</sup> While other supplies could be airlifted, heavy construction equipment and fuel would be sent by rail to Central Asia and then trucked into Afghanistan along this road. It should also be noted here that Russia has publicly expressed an interest not only in aiding the NATO campaign in Afghanistan but in participating in this supply route that would be an alternative to relying on Pakistan.<sup>53</sup>

Even so, few if any of these reports discerned the strategic opportunities for the United States that this road opens up, let alone the possible drawbacks in terms of potentially increased rivalry with Russia in Central Asia. While Kyrgyzstan already was a staging area for U.S. forces and some Central Asian leaders are allegedly eager to increase their role in the campaign, both for the expected economic benefits and because of a perception of a rising Taliban threat, they do not want a U.S. military presence. For these reasons, Washington has reassured them that it seeks no new bases in Central Asia despite Russian charges to the contrary (see below) and wants to use this projected supply line to ship nonmilitary items (no weapons or munitions) exclusively through local commercial companies.<sup>54</sup> These negotiations, along with the overall plan or a road, are obviously born of crisis and challenge, namely the war in Afghanistan. But this road and the concurrent economic crisis facing Central Asia also provide the impetus for an opportunity for the Obama administration.

Specifically, the prospect of this road opens up two new directions, or more precisely opportunities, for U.S. policy in Central Asia. First, it opens up prospects for enhanced regional cooperation and, second, it can galvanize our efforts to come to the assistance of strapped Central Asian governments during the current crisis even as it simultaneously alleviates our logistical problems and benefits them economically. Regional cooperation in Central Asia has been sorely lacking, but there are signs of a desire to achieve greater and more meaningful cooperation as regards Afghanistan. This road could thus be the centerpiece of a greater effort to help realize that goal. Certainly General Petraeus called for expanded regional cooperation to suppress terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking in Central Asia during his January 2009 tour of the region.<sup>55</sup>

Indeed, regional cooperation has been a U.S. goal for some time. In 2004 Washington launched a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) with the Central Asian states that aims to overcome impediments to intra-regional trade, economic development, and foreign direct investment. Since Washington also seeks to deepen ties between Central and South Asia, Indian, Pakistani, and Afghan representatives also participate. The State Department designated a special ambassador for Trade in what it thus calls Greater Central Asia, and Washington is helping Kazakhstan join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Moreover, the TIFA process “also presumes a close connection between economic and security issues in Eurasia,” arguing that economic development reduces the lure of extremism in Central Asia.<sup>56</sup> In a similar vein, General Petraeus and USCENTCOM fully realize that success in Afghanistan cannot be achieved other than by a sustained effort at regional cooperation among

Afghanistan, its neighbors (including Iran), and NATO.<sup>57</sup> Thus a successful strategy for winning the war in Afghanistan must seriously attend to Central Asia as an integral part of the plan for victory.

Given the visible urgency of the situation in Afghanistan, signs of an increased desire to generate more effective multilateral cooperation among the key players may actually be taking place.<sup>58</sup> One key issue where cooperation is necessary is the building of hydropower dams and provision of water to states that lack it, perhaps in return for energy shipments since those who have energy lack water and vice versa. Equally important, while there has been foot-dragging on providing sufficient water throughout Central Asia, there could be a basis for addressing the more commonly shared concern about improving the quality of whatever water is available.<sup>59</sup> Kyrgyzstan also fears that water shortages could intensify social tensions.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore the United States, by building this road and making it a truly multilateral project that leads to further infrastructural investments that can help tie these countries together, can also align itself with one of the deepest currents of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, its support for regional integration. Astana's support for such cooperation is naturally not disinterested. As the strongest economic player in the region, it probably stands to benefit inordinately both economically and politically from such cooperation if not integration.<sup>61</sup>

Of course, too close an American embrace for Kazakhstan's ambitions would immediately trigger suspicions, not only in Moscow and Beijing, but also in Uzbekistan's government in Tashkent since it sees itself as Kazakhstan's rival for predominance in Central Asia. Nevertheless, there are signs that the logjam on supplying Afghanistan by alternative routes from Central Asia may be melting, at least in part.

Similarly Uzbekistan has much to gain from the U.S. program for the road. Tashkent in 2008 granted NATO access to its railroad system and eased air-transit restrictions and did so without consulting Moscow or its other partners in the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).<sup>62</sup> As was its wont, Uzbekistan was thereby asserting its independence and freedom of maneuver. However, progress has been slow. But apart from the economic benefit of being a key transit country for Western logistics into Afghanistan, Uzbek leaders are reportedly seeking a high price for their cooperation, even though Tashkent is eager to see the Taliban threat contained. According to some local experts, Uzbek officials are trying to obtain a security guarantee for President Islam Karimov's administration, along with an expansion of military assistance and economic cooperation. They want all these benefits despite the fact that Tashkent has made scant progress on improving a woeful human rights record. Both Washington and Brussels are on record as insisting on human rights improvements as a condition for closer cooperation.<sup>63</sup>

Other motives for Tashkent's policies are equally compelling. Clearly it fears the impact of a Taliban victory on Central Asia as well as NATO-Russia tensions and Russia's continuing policy to gain status for the CSTO in order to insert itself between NATO and local states, preventing the latter from working with NATO without the CSTO's permission, and thereby securing a veto power on NATO activity there. While it wishes to remain free to maneuver between East and West, Tashkent sees and supports the necessity for a regional approach including Russia but also hopes to benefit from direct ties with Washington and NATO in regard to Afghanistan.<sup>64</sup> Since November 2008, NATO

has seemed determined to pursue the alternative of a Central Asian supply route; it is quite possible that both it and Uzbekistan might reach an agreement that redounds to both Uzbekistan's benefit and that of Karimov personally and/or the state.<sup>65</sup>

Tajikistan in particular would greatly benefit from the U.S. plan which could be a much-needed shot in the arm given its economic situation. In view of its extremely precarious domestic condition, Tajikistan faces a double-sided threat. The loss of remittances will impoverish many thousands of Tajik families who depend upon them for their sustenance. And the presence of thousands of able-bodied young men with nothing to do can provide a spark for a substantial increase in unrest, criminality, and violence, if not recruits for Islamic fundamentalism or other insurgent movements. If the economic situation in neighboring Uzbekistan also deteriorates, then this road, which is also supposed to traverse Uzbekistan, will have a comparable impact upon both the Uzbek and Tajik economies. We can also make the same argument for Kyrgyzstan, another weak state riddled by crime, corruption, and bad governance.<sup>66</sup>

These crises and the partial answer of this road signify an opportunity to exploit this concurrence of U.S. strategy and regional interests in a way to create a strategy that certainly includes but goes beyond military measures to help consolidate development and security in both Afghanistan and Central Asia. As former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated, "A nation cannot be built or rebuilt by military means alone. There's a vast gap between the Marine Corps and the Peace Corps, and we need to fill that gap with agencies and people who specialize in law, development, peacemaking, and the creation of lasting

democratic institutions.”<sup>67</sup> Likewise, it is essential to invest in regional security before the wolf is at the door and imposes ever greater costs that can then only be dealt with in tandem with the use of force which is inherently an alienating operation. Therefore an enlightened strategy for Central Asia will emphasize civilian aspects of development and reconstruction so as to minimize the potential future need for a heavy military footprint, something that has not always been the case in previous examples of U.S. policy. As a recent study pointed out,

The Army has created ad-hoc wartime SSTR capabilities with no real joint or interagency backbone or lasting capability. These efforts have focused solely on post-conflict operation with no thought of expanding tools of preemption (though the author may mean military tools we should expand that to civilian tools as well-author). Currently, no one agency executes operational control of U.S. soft and hard power Stability Operations capabilities. The U.S. ability to project civilian instruments of national power such as diplomacy, foreign assistance, economic reconstruction, and development, as well as rule of law, is also underfunded and underdeveloped.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, it should be clear that only the United States (and with it NATO and/or the European Union [EU]) combines the capabilities, resources, and skills to lead this effort even though, relatively speaking, it does not cost as much as may be imagined. Indeed, as one Tajik newspaper wrote, Russia’s military presence there is scaring away investors.<sup>69</sup>

For these reasons, the concurrence of U.S. military strategy and a new emphasis on Afghanistan with this crisis provides an opportunity as well as a challenge for the Obama administration. Simply stated, this road, and the accompanying regional strategy that

General Petraeus and others have talked about, can be implemented if the political will is there to allocate sufficient resources (including nonmaterial ones) in a coherent and comprehensive manner and to implement that strategy holistically to address the problems that could destabilize Central Asia, Afghanistan's strategic rear. In this case, the road would be a centerpiece of a bigger regional, economic strategy to help secure Central Asian economies and thus societies and states, while also expanding the fight against the Taliban that is in these states' mutual interest. As countless observers and scholars have constantly warned, to ensure any kind of security throughout this region and throughout the so-called arc of crisis, policymaking must be holistic, utilizing all the instruments of power and to the greatest possible extent. That quality must be both vertical, i.e., in terms of U.S. governmental organization, and horizontal, in terms of the policy areas to be addressed simultaneously. Equally important, security management, to be successful, must also leverage the capabilities of all those allies and international organizations that now have a growing stake in security there.<sup>70</sup> As Max Manwaring of the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Studies Institute has written,

The primary challenge, then, is to come to terms with the fact that contemporary security, *at whatever level*, is at its base a holistic political-diplomatic, socioeconomic, psychological-moral and military police effort. The corollary is to change from a singular military approach to a multidimensional, multiorganizational, multicultural and multinational paradigm. That, in turn, requires a conceptual framework and an organizational structure to promulgate unified civil-military planning and implementation of the multidimensional concept.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore this new supply road project should not be conceived of only in terms of its immediate military benefit (crucial as that nonetheless is), but rather as the starting point or centerpiece for a rejuvenated U.S. strategy and strategic process driven by the interagency process functioning as it ought to. That alone can undertake to help rescue the region from the ravages of global crisis and do so in an integrated, i.e., holistic, manner as described above.<sup>72</sup>

Strategic coordination among all the U.S. Government agencies involved is of the utmost importance to provide not just military security, but also economic assistance, jobs, trade, aid, investment, (both commercial and infrastructural), and even such critical public goods as environmental security to rescue the area from its dangerous shortage of fresh water.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, to achieve support from multilateral players like Central Asian governments and even Russia, the strategy must address their needs and security demands, e.g., their heightened concern over the impact of drugs coming from Afghanistan to and through their countries.<sup>74</sup> For years these governments have been complaining about the U.S. neglect of this problem and unwillingness to attack it head on. Based on published accounts of General Petraeus' conversations with Central Asian leaders, it appears that he understands their concerns and the need to address them, and has included expanded cooperation on measures against narcotics trafficking as part of his larger strategy for Central Asia to win their agreement to his plans.<sup>75</sup>

Since 2005 and the ouster of U.S. forces from their base at Karshi Khanabad in Uzbekistan, the United States has been falling behind Russia and China in

the strategic attention and resources it has devoted to Central Asia and thus in its influence there.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, China grants more aid and assistance to Central Asia than does the United States, indicating Central Asia's relative priority for Beijing as compared to Washington. But given the proximity of the war in Afghanistan to Central Asia and the stakes of possible defeat to the West, this is obviously an unbalanced if not misguided approach to the region.

This does not mean that the United States has no leverage in Central Asia. For example, in 2007 U.S. Marines conducted a counterterrorism training exercise with Tajikistan's Special and Border Guards. The United States also still retains its base at Manas in Kyrgyzstan and, thanks to assiduous wooing of Uzbekistan by the United States, NATO, and Germany, U.S. forces have obtained a certain amount of access to Uzbekistan's air base at Termez. There are also assistance programs and small amounts of aid for projects that can be listed as support for democratization.<sup>77</sup> No doubt Uzbekistan and Tajikistan as well as other Central Asian governments would welcome greater U.S. economic attention both because of the current crisis and because none of them wants to fall into excessive dependence upon either Russia or China. If anything, they are clearly resisting Moscow's latest gambit of trying to force them into a ruble zone (a policy inherited from the Third Reich which used it to dominate Eastern and Central Europe economically before conquering it militarily).<sup>78</sup> Indeed, that desire to safeguard their independence by multiplying foreign contacts could be said of all the Central Asian countries since they all, to one degree or another, constantly practice a multi-vector diplomacy that shifts from one partner to another.

## **Foreign Involvement in Central Asia in a Different Light.**

This new U.S. strategy harmonizes quite well with Central Asian states' ongoing conduct of such diplomacy, albeit in varying forms and degrees. Therefore, we need to see this multi-vector diplomacy in a context different from the one usually advanced that extensive foreign involvement is universally or at least generally regarded as a threat to these states' sovereignty. In fact, Central Asian governments' multi-vector diplomacy has been intrinsic to their state-building project since its inception in 1991-92 when the Soviet Union collapsed. And these states' reliance upon external support and even a form of external patronage is closely tied to their domestic security perspectives. In an earlier essay, we argued that one must look at the interplay between these states' simultaneous need, typical of Third World states, to build both internal and external security in environments where the very concept of a state, especially a sovereign independent state, is unprecedented or relatively new.<sup>79</sup> These countries simultaneously face the exigencies of both state-building, i.e., assuring internal security and defense against external threats without sufficient means, time, or resources to compete successfully with other more established states. Not surprisingly, their primary concern becomes internal security and their continuation in power, hence the proliferation of multiple military forces, intelligence, and police forces, which often enjoy more resources than do their regular armies, and their governments' recourse to rent-seeking, authoritarian, and clientilistic policies.<sup>80</sup>

These facts possess significant relevance for any discussion of security, particularly in the Third World, including Central Asia, where the security environment

is one of “reversed anarchy” as described by Mikhail Alexiev and Bjorn Moeller. Moeller observes that,

While in modernity the inside of a state was supposed to be orderly, thanks to the workings of the state as a Hobbesian “Leviathan,” the outside remained anarchic. For many states in the Third World, the opposite seems closer to reality—with fairly orderly relations to the outside in the form of diplomatic representations, but total anarchy within.<sup>81</sup>

Similarly, Amitav Acharya observes that,

Unlike in the West, national security concepts in Asia are strongly influenced by concerns for regime survival. Hence, security policies in Asia are not so much about protection against external military threats, but against internal challenges. Moreover, the overwhelming proportion of conflicts in Asia fall into the intra-state category, meaning they reflect the structural weaknesses of the state, including a fundamental disjunction between its territorial and ethnic boundaries. Many of these conflicts have been shown to have a spillover potential; hence the question of outside interference is an ever-present factor behind their escalation and containment. Against this backdrop, the principle of non-interference becomes vital to the security predicament of states. And a concept of security that challenges the unquestioned primacy of the state and its right to remain free from any form of external interference arouses suspicion and controversy.<sup>82</sup>

Indeed, for these states, and arguably even for transitional states like Russia, internal police forces enjoy greater state resources than do the regular armies, this being a key indicator of the primacy of internal security as a factor in defining the term national security.<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, it still remains true that if these states cannot defend themselves militarily

against threats that have arisen due to a previous failure to provide security, they collapse as classical thinking about hard security would predict.

This is also the case in Central Asia where the main issue is ensuring the continuation in power of the ruling regime and of the president's power. Even though these states acknowledge that they face serious external threats of terrorism and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan, which then corrupts and corrodes the socio-political fabric in their countries, those threats are second to the preservation of the domestic status quo. Indeed, to a certain extent, as Anna Matveeva has noted for Tajikistan, governments outsource part or most of the responsibility for dealing with those issues to other states and major powers.<sup>84</sup> Similarly in 2007 Kyrgyzstan invited Russia to bring its border guards back to Kyrgyzstan and to expand the size of its Kant Air Base because Bishkek could not afford to raise such troops on its own.<sup>85</sup> These governments have also shown considerable willingness to associate themselves with Russia and China in regard to issues like external calls for liberalization and democracy because they regard democracy promotion from Washington as an outright threat to the status quo, which, they maintain, boils down to a choice between them and Islamic fundamentalism. For that reason, Central Asian think tanks and analysts have urged that Washington pursue a different strategy, one that emphasizes not democracy promotion, but regional economic integration among Central Asian states and with neighbors like Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan.<sup>86</sup>

Indeed, President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan expressly linked the U.S. failure to win success for its crusade for democracy to the problems in Afghanistan. In November 2006 he publicly connected his and presumably his colleagues' frustration with

Washington's democracy promotion campaign in a country and region with no democratic traditions to NATO's problems in stabilizing Afghanistan. Obviously the projected road through Central Asia to Tajikistan exemplifies a strategy that could give a greater impetus to a focus on economic development and regional cooperation, while sidestepping this issue, thus supporting two mainsprings of Nazarbayev's foreign policies and avoiding contentious ones.<sup>87</sup>

And again for these reasons, states like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have pursued multi-vector diplomacy, aiming to make themselves agreeable to all their neighbors and all the great powers so as to avoid having to choose among them. Likewise, they play up their weakness as something that cannot be allowed to go further in order to extract aid and assistance from these powers and to exploit the almost compulsive efforts of the great powers to enlist them, each for their own side against the other rivals to gain more autonomy.<sup>88</sup> In this respect, they are clearly emulating what Third World states often sought to do during the Cold War, often with great success.

Through this multi-vector diplomacy local governments have hitherto mitigated their potential external security dilemmas by exploiting great and major power rivalries to secure tangible security assistance that they could not otherwise produce on their own. They thereby prevent or have sought to prevent any of those external powers from dominating the regional security agenda, if not the region, while securing the resources they need to deal with their domestic security challenges. This external "assistance" is becoming ever more costly to Russia as the cost of energy and Central Asia's ability to export it to diverse markets rises and as the region's strategic importance

grows, making investment in it ever more necessary for those powers which have interests or wish to see themselves as great international actors.

Indeed, a central point in these states' diplomacy is the effort to form better and more extensive global trade links with states beyond Russia or other post-Soviet states. According to *Jane's Defence Weekly* in 2002, "Forming better trade links and means to access international markets is a priority for these states and very often a key in directing foreign policy."<sup>89</sup> This is very visible, of course, in their energy policies. The security and material assistance the greater powers provide allow Central Asian regimes to worry less about external threats and even to forego genuine regional integration. Meanwhile, they can concentrate on exploiting those rivalries and the circumstances that grow out of them like energy rivalry to increase their domestic security, and leverage enough resources like energy rents with which to keep domestic challenges at bay.

Thus, paradoxically, the so-called new great game among the great powers for influence in Central Asia has materially assisted domestic security and not just by foreclosing possibilities for any one power to dominate it. For example, Kazakh analysts note that one reason why they value the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) so highly is that it enhances their sovereignty and provides them with a multilateral forum where both Russia and China, to some degree, check each other's capacity for "playing games" with Central Asian states.<sup>90</sup> One way such assistance from the major powers contributes to regional security is through direct material assistance, e.g., China's \$900 million loan to local governments after the SCO summit in 2005; NATO's help through the Partnership

for Peace in building up Kazakhstan's armed forces; U.S. presence in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan; Russia's military presence in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and more recently Uzbekistan; and the growing scope of the exercises of SCO member forces against terrorism, separatism, and extremism, as displayed at the 2007 SCO exercises. The SCO also functions in this way on behalf of regional governments. The construction of the aforementioned supply line through Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan will have a comparable impact upon the region.

Such assistance not only brings rewards in itself, it also stimulates anxieties about one or another power winning, forcing the other state to make greater regional investments in Central Asia to retrieve their influence. Thus Chinese investments in pipelines from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in 2006 not only led Russia to invest in building its own new pipelines from these countries to Russia, it then also agreed to pay Ashgabat \$135/thousand cubic meters (tcm) of gas, a 30 percent increase. In turn, that led Ashgabat to hold out with China for a price of \$195/tcm, a price that became its benchmark for all future sales abroad.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Uzbekistan was able to secure that price of \$130/tcm from Gazprom, which was 30 percent higher than the previous price it paid. By 2008, it and other producers were able to force Russia to agree to a price of \$300/tcm before the ensuing financial crash of that year.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the rivalry with the EU and the United States for influence over the direction of gas pipelines has also led Russia to discuss new energy deals with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which both eagerly want and which give them more resources to meet pressing internal challenges, even if Russia raises its profile in their countries.<sup>93</sup>

Alternatively, the benefits the Central Asian governments gain from their multi-vector diplomacy where other actors are allowed in to provide security against domestic threats may be purely political as in the case of the SCO's political dimension. The SCO functions, inter alia, as an organization of mutual protection and for the granting of the international legitimacy its members so desperately lack and crave. At the same time, it is very much a way for Central Asian governments to induce Russia and China to provide this tangible and intangible economic-political support for them. All the members support the continuation of the domestic status quo in their countries and have united to reject calls for externally interested parties like Washington on behalf of democratic norms. Thus Russia and China provide both security and ideological cover for local regimes, allowing them to continue on their preset course with some sense that key players will back them up.<sup>94</sup> Naturally the members value this help and will not soon or casually forego receiving it, especially at a time of war nearby.

Indeed Moscow's elite appears to view any gain by China or the United States in Central Asia with unceasing paranoia. Thus its media repeatedly speculates about China's economic "conquest" of Central Asia and regards the handover of two obsolete *Huey* helicopters by Washington to Astana as the beginning of the end of Russian influence there.<sup>95</sup> As a 2007 report of the Russian-Chinese Business Council observed,

Being a member of the SCO, China views other members of the organization as promising markets. It is China that wishes to be the engine behind the trade and economic cooperation within the framework of the SCO. . . . China's intentions to form [a] so-called economic space within

the SCO are well known. Owing to that fact, experts have been speaking about greater Chinese economic expansion in various parts of the world, including Central Asia. . . . Beijing has activated ties with all Central Asian countries and strives to comprehensively strengthen economic relations and the dependency of these countries on its market.<sup>96</sup>

Similarly its Foreign Ministry regards Western activities in Central Asia, whether they are the OSCE, EU, NATO, or the United States, as aiming to annex the area to Western strategic ambitions to put under control Iran, Afghanistan, etc. Therefore, Russia must strengthen its activities to subordinate Central Asia to its purposes.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, it is quite likely that any effort by a Central Asian state to open itself up to the road or, even worse from Russia's standpoint, a U.S. base would trigger the most negative reactions from Moscow.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, Chief of the General Staff General Nikolai Makarov charged, completely falsely, in December 2008 that the United States is setting up new bases in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>99</sup> It is precisely that knee-jerk animosity to U.S. interests that led Moscow to induce Bishkek to evict the United States from Manas. That reaction is a key reason why a U.S. Government that can no longer act unilaterally in Central Asia has rightly included Russia in the negotiations over the new road to allay its suspicions and remove its potential block to the plan for a road.

Russia's attitude towards the U.S. military presence in Central Asia is one of undisguised wariness. Its posture is the same as has been the case for several years, namely that those bases are only tolerable insofar and for as long as they are used to defeat the Taliban; otherwise there is no need for them and they should go. Indeed, Russia has long since made clear

its opposition to any foreign bases (including Chinese bases) in Central Asia.<sup>100</sup> More recently, on October 8, 2008, Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Denisov stated that Russia does not object to U.S. military presence in Central Asia "as long as it stays within the proclaimed anti-terrorist goals and is not used to push somebody's 'extra-regional' interests."<sup>101</sup> This means that Washington, before dealing with local regimes, must first go through Moscow, an unacceptable diminution of those states' sovereignty and capitulation to Moscow's craving for a closed sphere of influence. It may also be the case that Russia has even grander ambitions in the area as Rogov's remarks above suggest.<sup>102</sup>

Moscow clearly also seeks a larger role in Afghanistan. It has good security reasons that justify this intention. For example, more Russians die annually from heroin, largely imported from Afghanistan, than died in its war with Afghanistan. Unless that flow is stopped, as Moscow and Central Asian governments have been urging for years, this figure will probably increase.<sup>103</sup> Similarly Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently said that Russia is trying to support not only Afghanistan but also Pakistan and NATO, and advocated increased Russia-NATO cooperation, specifically with the CSTO (that NATO refuses to recognize lest it become a medium that blocks NATO from direct engagement with Central Asian states).<sup>104</sup> Indeed, Rogov's proposal may be a trial balloon from the ministry to see how far Moscow can advance in Afghanistan with NATO.

But the foregoing suggests that Russia has not objected to a new road linking Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan if it can participate (even if another stream of supplies comes from the Caucasus). Certainly, it professes a shared interest with Washington in forestalling any upheaval in Central Asia. The

difference is that, especially in its current straitened circumstances, it has less economic leverage than before to help stabilize the situation. Although some Russian experts are urging the government to stimulate a program for the industrialization of Central Asia for its own security, the resources are not there for such a long-term extensive program. Second, Moscow's policies to date have aimed to exploit Central Asia, keep it tied to Russia's apron strings, and restrict its foreign trade and diversification of its economies away from excessive reliance on energy and other raw materials. For all its promises of energy deals, in fact, implementation has been slow to occur.<sup>105</sup> Instead, Andrei Grozin, Head of the Department on Central Asia and Kazakhstan at Russia's Institute for CIS Countries, has frankly outlined Russia's overtly exploitative approach to energy issues with Central Asian states. He told the Rosbalt news agency in 2005 that for Uzbekistan to cooperate economically with Russia, it "will need to give up the system of state capitalism, in particular, by 'shaking' servicing of expensive ore mining and energy industries off state shoulders." Grozin maintained that if Gazprom obtained control over Uzbekistan's gas transporting system, and if Lukoil was granted free access to exploration and extraction of oil, and Russia's expansion into the nutrition and light industry sectors of the Uzbek market takes place, "then one can say that the Russian state has received what it expected from the [Russo-Uzbek treaty of November 2005] alliance treaty."<sup>106</sup> Elsewhere Grozin admitted that Russia's neo-imperial policies are in many respects against economic logic although they make excellent geopolitical sense from an imperial perspective. Thus he wrote,

The changes on the world market might force the Russian Federation to start importing uranium instead of exporting it. This may happen in the relatively near future. For this reason, the uranium of Kazakhstan and its products are of special interest for Russia, while bilateral cooperation in the atomic, space research, and other high tech applied spheres might pull all the other branches along with them. Russia does not profit financially from its relations with Kazakhstan, which have nothing to do with altruism: financial input is accepted as payment for Russia's geopolitical interests and national security. This is a long-term strategy that allows the Republic of Kazakhstan to adjust its nearly entire scientific and technical potential to Russia: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are two key Central Asian states. This strategy also applies to the military-technical sphere—Moscow sells its resources for “allied” prices not only to strengthen military and foreign policy contacts with Kazakhstan, but also tie it, for many years to come, to Russia's military-industrial complex and standards.<sup>107</sup>

### **Towards an American Strategy.**

Russia's defects as regional hegemon open the way to an integrated, multilateral, and multidimensional U.S. and Western strategy for Central Asia to achieve objectives that are, in some degree, shared by Russia—namely a victory over the Taliban and al-Qaeda; the ensuing termination of terrorism projected beyond Afghanistan to the United States, Russia, Central Asia, or elsewhere; and the forestalling of domestic upheavals in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Obviously Central Asian governments also share these objectives. Beyond those goals, U.S. policy statements going back a decade postulate the consolidation of Central Asian states' security from terrorism and all other threats to their de facto and de jure independence as a key U.S. goal.<sup>108</sup> These statements and both the policies of the Clinton and Bush administrations explicitly

pursued these objectives and were thus understood by both domestic and foreign observers, including Central Asian ones, as aiming to support these states against Russian and all other efforts to circumscribe their political, economic, and military independence. And these still remain valid, important U.S. objectives whose importance is only enhanced by the fighting in Afghanistan.

Central Asian governments' interest in maintaining the maximum amount of flexibility and independence in their foreign relations coincides neatly with both U.S. capabilities and interests. It obviously is in Washington's interest that its logistical rear in Afghanistan be stabilized especially at a time of prolonged economic hardship in the region and mounting conflict in Afghanistan. The intended supply road can and hopefully will provide a major boost to local economies by giving contracts to local companies and hopefully provide employment to some of the unemployed in these countries. But the Obama administration should not stop there. America, especially with European support, can leverage its superior economic power to regain a stronger position in the region and help prevent these embattled states from falling further prey to Russia and/or China, which cannot compete at that level with the United States or with the United States and Europe together. In any case, Asia's answers to Central Asian issues consist of maintaining the status quo against all changes, leaving these as backward states dependent on their cash crops and with little or no possibility of cooperating among themselves. In other words, the Russian approach over time enhances their vulnerability to challenges stemming from the Taliban, the global economic crisis, or a confluence of the two phenomena.

Meanwhile the Bush administration has noted that the business community is playing a bigger role in Central Asian states besides Kazakhstan, the regional economic leader. And that role is going beyond energy investments. Although Washington cannot offer state-backed loans or elaborate project credits, as does Beijing, it supports WTO membership for all Central Asian states and has established a U.S.-Central Asia Trade and Investment Framework Agreement.<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, there is an opportunity here for the Obama administration to enlarge upon this foundation with a considerably larger and multidimensional program of trade, aid, and investment throughout Central Asia to accomplish the standing U.S. objectives of enhancing these states' economic independence, economic security, and opportunities for their independent participation in the global economy without a Russian or Chinese filter.

Scholars have long realized that the building of infrastructural projects can overcome Central Asia's centuries-long isolation from major international trade routes and provide not only lasting economic growth but also access to new possibilities for political action and integration, into regional blocs as well as the wider global economy. As Robert Canfield has argued, changes in transport facilities and communication devices that began in Soviet times and have continued to the present are exercising a decisive influence upon emerging geostrategic and economic realities in Central Asia. Specifically, the 19th century vision of an integrated network of rail lines connecting the former Soviet and Tsarist empires, Iran, India, and Europe is becoming a reality. Equally important, market access varies inversely with transport cost. To the degree that Central Asian energy costs more to transport to world markets, the less access it will have. But, conversely,

to the extent that roads and other forms of travel, transport, and communication are built into Central Asia that lower the cost of transporting people, goods, and services, it can be more integrated with the broader global economy. Surely such ideas lie behind various Russian and Chinese projects for such developments, as well as behind the rivalry over pipelines to send Central Asian energy to Europe and Asia.<sup>110</sup> Thus the U.S. road project falls squarely into that category of exemplary projects that may serve purposes other than economic stability and global or regional integration, but which ultimately can facilitate those objectives and outcomes.

Beyond that, the necessity of supplying troops with large amounts of potable water suggests a second benefit from this road. Perhaps it can galvanize greater cooperation among Central Asian states, if not to increase the amount of water they consume, then at least to upgrade the quality for the benefit of all of its users. There is no doubt that water shortages are a real threat to the stability of some of these societies and a cause for unrest in them.<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, such infrastructural and environmental projects could provide a spur for a much needed but still obstructed regional economic integration or at least enhanced cooperation. There is no doubt that at least some, if not all, of these states are receptive to the idea of greater cooperation against the Taliban.<sup>112</sup> Shared participation in a major logistical project that brings mutual benefit while supporting the war effort could lead to spillovers that foster still more cooperation in other areas like water. While it is true that the U.S. budget is strained and has many claimants upon its resources, this is a region where relatively small sums, given the totality of U.S. budgetary outlays, could

make a substantial geopolitical difference. Moreover, it might be possible to arrange matters so that the budget is not broken here while redirecting existing programs towards a more holistic and integrated, i.e., multidimensional understanding of regional security needs and thus towards greater effectiveness. Certainly neither Russia nor China could compete with a serious investment of U.S. resources and time in this region.

But we should not think that we can do this on the cheap. The lessons of Manas are clear: If the United States seeks a policy position in Central Asia commensurate with the requirements of victory in Afghanistan, then it will have to pay by investing the resources necessary to do the job. Otherwise its regional credibility will steadily diminish. We cannot pretend that a geopolitical struggle is not occurring in this increasingly critical region of the world. Since “power projection activities are an input into the world order,” Russian, European, Chinese, and American force deployments into Central Asia and the Caucasus and economic-political actions to gain access, influence, and power there represent potentially competitive and profound attempts at engendering a long-term restructuring of the regional strategic order.<sup>113</sup>

### **Specific Recommendations.**

Specifically, the U.S. Government under President Obama should consider and act upon the following recommendations and policies to facilitate the aforementioned strategic goals of victory in Afghanistan and the enhanced independence of Central Asian states.

*First*, it must continue the Bush administration’s emphasis upon regional integration of Central Asia with South and East Asia in regard to energy,

electricity, and other commodities.<sup>114</sup> As S. Frederick Starr, Director of the Central Asia Caucasus Institute at the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, has written,

Clearly defeating the Taliban and destroying Al Qaeda should be a priority. But these goals are best pursued in the context of a broader and more positive regional purpose. This would be true even if the rise of the SCO and Eurasec [Eurasian Economic Community] did not call for a strategic response from the United States.<sup>115</sup>

Washington should also expand its horizons to foster greater U.S.-European and U.S.-Japanese cooperation in Central Asia so that these states are able to trade more openly with Europe and the United States as well. In other words, the West should leverage its superior economic power to achieve constructive and jointly conceived strategic objectives. While energy and access to pipelines are the priorities, other goods and services must also be included wherever possible. Greater involvement by the EU and Japan that parallels NATO involvement would therefore contribute to this latter enhancement of existing U.S. policies.

*Second*, the administration must build upon that foundation and conceive of the road it now seeks to build for logistical purposes to supply U.S. forces as also being a powerful engine for regional economic development and integration. This aspect of the policy called for here as part of the overall strategy for winning the war in Afghanistan and stabilizing Central Asia must be a multilateral project with as many local and other key partners (NATO, Russia, and China) as possible. This is because "The more consent America attracts abroad, the greater the practical assistance upon which the country will be able to draw and the more

likely that U.S. policy will succeed. If this sometimes elusive condition is met, American strategy should prove sustainable.”<sup>116</sup>

This multilateral support is essential to persuade local participants that U.S. aims are not inimical to their own but rather in sync with them. As Sir Michael Howard wrote in 2003,

American power is indispensable for the preservation of global order, and as such it must be recognized, accommodated, and where possible supported. But if it is to be effective, it needs to be seen and legitimized as such by the international community. If it is perceived rather as an instrument serving a unilateral conception of national security that amounts to a claim to world domination—pursuing, in fact, a purely “American War against Terror”—that is unlikely to happen.<sup>117</sup>

*Third*, it must not detach this road from other parts of U.S. policy. Instead the administration should see it as the centerpiece of a coordinated policy and policy actions to integrate existing programs for trade, investment, and infrastructural projects, particularly with regard to water quality and increasing water supplies for all of Central Asia. This will lay a better foundation for the lasting economic and thus political security of Central Asian states, and indirectly through such support will help their continuing economic-political independence and integration with Asia and the global economy.

*Fourth*, it must, at the same time, reform the interagency process which is universally regarded as broken. We need to pursue security in this region and in individual countries as specified above, namely in a holistic, multidimensional, and integrated way that enhances all the elements of security, not just military security. While we do not espouse any particular course

of reform of the interagency process, several points should be made here. First, the strategy and policy outlined is not purely or mainly military. Second, it therefore optimally should not be led by the U.S. military but include it under civilian leadership as an important, but not dominating, element in that strategy for Central Asia. While in Afghanistan actual hostilities requiring a military strategy are required, it is also accepted that an important component of our policy and strategy there must be to improve governance and economic conditions for the population.<sup>118</sup> The overall strategy must shun the previous procedures and lack of integrated planning for both hard and soft power elements that have led to “stovepipe efforts that do not achieve full and efficient results and effects in areas of operations.”<sup>119</sup> Unfortunately this attribute is pervasive and not only in regard to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Thus, in 2005 Congressman J. Randy Forbes testified to the congressionally mandated U.S.-China Commission that,

At every briefing we attend, no matter how high ranking the participants, we are told that there is no coordinated approach to analyzing the multi-faceted complex nature of the China problem and the communication between agencies is inadequate at best. This must be remedied as soon as possible.<sup>120</sup>

Instead, as one recent paper on the subject of reforming this process notes, if the U.S. system is to address the ever increasing level of complexity in providing security at home and abroad, “indeed if it is to operate as a system at all rather than a collection of separate components – then security reform must stress unity, integration, and inclusion across all levels.”<sup>121</sup> This new process must take a long-term view of the problems with which it will grapple, especially in the

light of our own financial crisis.<sup>122</sup> Within that call for reform, there are several common themes in recent works and statements on this subject that emphasize, as well, the need for multilateral support for such programs.<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, in all our efforts, whether they are regional or within a particular country, experience shows the absolute inescapable necessity that the operation to provide such multidimensional security must be organized along lines of unity of command and unity of effort to succeed. Whether the format is one of a country team led by the ambassador that pulls all the strings of U.S. programs together or a Joint Inter-Agency Task Force (JIATF) is almost a secondary question. The paramount need is for well-conceived plans that can be implemented under the principle of this unity of command leading to a unity of effort.<sup>124</sup>

*Fifth*, a key component of an expanded, integrated, and holistic approach to security in both Afghanistan and Central Asia must entail a vigorous effort to combat narcotics trafficking. This is not just because it is a scourge to both Afghanistan and the CIS, but also because it is clear that the Afghan government is either incapable or unwilling to act and is more concerned with blaming others for its deficiencies.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, such action will convince Central Asian states and Russia that we take their security concerns seriously and will facilitate their cooperation with our policy and strategy.

*Sixth*, the administration and NATO should jointly offer Central Asian states an expanded menu of “a la carte” programs for enhancing security, border defense, train and equip programs, interoperability, antinarcotics, and, if possible, combat support roles for

Central Asian countries in Afghanistan. "Parallel to this, the United States should enter into 5-year military-to-military agreements with each country similar to what it has recently renewed with Kazakhstan."<sup>126</sup> Doing so would further engage the U.S. military with those forces in Central Asia and provide them with an alternative model to the Russian army's ways of doing business. This would also be a visible sign of continuing high U.S. interest in Central Asian countries' defense and security and of its desire to cooperate with them toward realizing their goals.

## **Conclusions.**

Arguably, only on the basis of such an integrated multidimensional and multilateral program can a strategy to secure Central Asia against the ravages of economic crisis and war be built, while we also seek to prosecute the war in Afghanistan in a similarly holistic way. It has long since been a critical point in U.S. policy for Central Asia that we seek to advance these states' independence, security, and integration, both at a regional level and with the global economy. U.S. experts and scholars have also argued for such a perspective.<sup>127</sup> Thus this project could and probably should serve as the centerpiece of a renewed American economic strategy to help Central Asia fight off the Taliban and cope simultaneously with the global economic crisis. An integrated program of economic and military action in Central Asia is surely called for given the scope of our growing involvement and the stakes involved in a region whose strategic importance is, by all accounts, steadily growing. Especially as we are now increasing our troop commitment to Afghanistan and building this new supply road,

challenge and opportunity are coming together to suggest a more enduring basis for a lasting U.S. contribution to Central Asia's long-term security. In effect, the present crisis has brought matters to the point where the United States has obtained a second chance in Central Asia, even as it is becoming more important in world affairs. It is rare that states get a second chance in world politics. But when the opportunity knocks, somebody should be at home to answer the door.

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