

**GROWING U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS
IN CENTRAL ASIA**

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FOREWORD

Among the many changes brought to American security policy by the attacks of September 11, 2001, is a shift in the strategic geography. Regions and nations that had been at the periphery of concern have taken on new importance because of their relationship to terrorists and the states that sponsor them. Nowhere is this more true than in Central Asia. Until recently, the United States paid very little attention to Central Asia. Now the combination of energy reserves and the region's location has increased its strategic significance a great deal.

In this study, Dr. Elizabeth Wishnick, currently a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Lingnan University, Hong Kong, assesses U.S. security interests and military activities in Central Asia. She notes that strengthening the Central Asian states against terrorism and assisting their transition to stable and prosperous nations are difficult and fraught with danger. In particular, there is the risk that the U.S. military presence in the region and security assistance to repressive regimes might taint America. If not astutely managed, this strategy could have the opposite of the intended results and generate increased instability, spark anti-Americanism, and antagonize Russia and China. To avoid this, Dr. Wishnick advocates a multilateral strategy that integrates the military, political, and economic elements of national power and prods the Central Asian regimes toward reform.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer this study to help U.S. defense leaders and strategic planners assess U.S. security interests in Central Asia.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

ELIZABETH WISHNICK is an associate at the East Asian Institute at Columbia University. In 2002-03 she will be a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. She is the author of *Mending Fences: The Evolution of Moscow's China Policy from Brezhnev to Yeltsin* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001) and of numerous articles on great power relations and regional development in Northeast Asia, published in *Asian Survey*, *NBR Analysis*, *SAIS Review*, *Journal of East Asian Affairs*, *Issues and Studies*, and *Perspectives Chinoises*, as well as in several edited volumes. She has taught at Barnard College, Columbia University and at Yale College, and has been a research fellow at Taiwan's Academia Sinica, the Hoover Institution, and the Davis Center at Harvard University. Dr. Wishnick's current research focuses on Sino-Russian relations, Chinese migration issues, Russia and inter-Korean relations, and the integration of the Russian Far East in Northeast Asia. She received a Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University, an M.A. in Russian and East European Studies from Yale University, and a B.A. from Barnard College, and speaks both Russian and Chinese.

SUMMARY

As Secretary of State Colin Powell told the House International Relations Committee in February 2002, the United States “will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before.” After providing background on the development of U.S. security interests in Central Asia, this monograph examines post-9/11 trends in U.S. policy and military engagement.

In the 1990s the United States initiated military engagement with Central Asia to support the region’s integration with western political-military institutions, as well as to protect the sovereignty and independence of these states, assist them to improve their border security against transnational threats, encourage them to adopt market-oriented reform and democratization, and ensure access to energy resources in the region. U.S. military cooperation expanded rapidly with Central Asian states in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 due to the framework of relations that had been built piecemeal in the 1990s. For the first time the United States acquired temporary basing in this region in response to a changing security environment, as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan became frontline states in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Anti-terrorism became the central focus of U.S. policy in the region, although other goals still remain important.

The author argues that by placing a priority on anti-terrorism in U.S. policy toward Central Asia and rewarding Central Asian leaders for basing rights, the Bush administration is shoring up authoritarian regimes and encouraging public distrust of U.S. intentions in the region. She points out that weak regional security organizations, contingent support in Russia and China to the expanding American military foothold in the region, and instability in Central Asia will pose considerable challenges for the U.S.

military. In conclusion, the author recommends an emphasis on rapid deployment from existing bases in Turkey rather than continued basing in Central Asia, a more coherent regional strategy and improved foreign area expertise for the Central Asian region, and a multilateral approach to addressing instability in the area.

GROWING U.S. SECURITY INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

In the 1990s the United States initiated military engagement with Central Asia to support the region's integration with western political-military institutions, as well as to protect the sovereignty and independence of these states, assist them to improve their border security against transnational threats, encourage them to adopt market-oriented reform and democratization, and ensure access to energy resources in the region. After 9/11, for the first time the United States acquired temporary basing in this region in response to a changing security environment, as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan became frontline states in Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. Anti-terrorism has become the central focus of U.S. policy in the region, although other goals still remain important. As Secretary of State Colin Powell told the House International Relations Committee, the United States "will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before."¹

Prior to 9/11, Central Asia had been relatively marginal to U.S. national security, but since then the region has assumed a new importance as U.S. policymakers have used the lessons of ENDURING FREEDOM to refashion the American national security framework and revise long-standing concepts of deterrence to address new threats from international terrorism. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld noted that the war in Afghanistan shows that the United States is prepared to take preemptive action against states sponsoring terrorism.² Although as a presidential candidate George W. Bush had criticized President William Clinton for turning the United States into "the world's policeman," the Bush administration is currently revising the United States national security strategy to support

preemptive action against terrorists and the countries that support them.³

In a June 1, 2002, address at the United States Military Academy at West Point, President Bush outlined what he termed the “three silos” of his foreign policy: defending the peace against threats from terrorists and tyrants; preserving the peace by building good relations among great powers; and extending the peace by encouraging free and open societies.⁴ This policy, as applied to Central Asia since 9/11, has proven to embrace mutually contradictory goals. By placing a priority on anti-terrorism in U.S. policy toward Central Asia and rewarding Central Asian leaders for basing rights, the Bush administration is shoring up authoritarian regimes and encouraging public distrust of U.S. intentions in the region. Although Russia, and to a lesser extent, China have cooperated with the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism, their support is not unqualified and could easily dissipate in the event the United States decides to maintain a long-term military presence in Central Asia or expand the war on terrorism in a major ground attack against Iraq.

After providing background on the development of U.S. security interests in Central Asia, this monograph examines post-9/11 trends in U.S. policy and military engagement.

The monograph points out that weak regional security organizations, contingent support in Russia and China to the expanding American military foothold in the region, and instability in Central Asia will pose considerable challenges for the United States military. In conclusion, the monograph recommends an emphasis on rapid deployment from existing bases in Turkey rather than continued basing in Central Asia, a more coherent regional strategy and improved foreign area expertise for the Central Asian region, and a multilateral approach to addressing instability in the area.

The Development of U.S. Security Interests in Central Asia.

U.S. military cooperation with Central Asian states expanded rapidly in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 due to the framework of relations that had been built piecemeal in the 1990s. After recognizing the newly independent Central Asian states in late 1991, the United States developed diplomatic relations with them in an effort to support democratization and responsible security policies, and provide a counterweight to the expansion of Russian, Chinese, and Iranian influence.⁵ With the passage of the Freedom Support Act on October 24, 1992, the United States laid the foundation for multifaceted assistance to the Central Asian states, initially focusing on democratization and the promotion of free market economies. Security cooperation increasingly would play an important role in U.S. relations with these states because of the important U.S. security interest in eliminating nuclear weapons based in Kazakhstan and in preventing proliferation in the region.

Consequently, Kazakhstan was the initial focus of U.S. security cooperation in Central Asia. In December 1993, Vice-President Al Gore and Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a cooperative threat reduction (CTR) agreement to dismantle and destroy the 104 SS-18 missiles and silos in Kazakhstan. The following year, U.S.-Kazakhstan security cooperation became institutionalized in a joint commission.⁶ By mid-1994, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, had joined NATO's partnership for peace program (PfP), and officers from these states, plus Tajikistan, began participating in PfP exercises as of 1995.⁷ The inclusion of the Central Asian states in the PfP program formalized their relations with NATO, provided a mechanism for regional security cooperation, and established a basis for combined action. According to Strobe Talbott, Deputy Secretary of State during the Clinton administration, expanding military-to-military cooperation would help reduce regional instability and promote mutual security in

an effort to avoid any replay of the 19th Century Great Game with its zero-sum competition for influence among great powers.⁸

Due to concern about the threat of proliferation of nuclear materials from Kazakhstan, since 1994 the United States has been assisting the country to shut down the Aktau fast breeder reactor and remove nuclear materials. In recognition of the geopolitical importance of Uzbekistan in the struggle to eliminate Osama Bin Laden's terrorist network, a U.S.-Uzbekistan Joint Commission was formed in February 1998.⁹ In 1999, the United States and Uzbekistan signed a CTR agreement to dismantle and decontaminate a biological weapons research facility and to provide alternative employment for its scientists. Uzbekistan's importance to U.S. nonproliferation efforts was highlighted in March 2000, when Uzbekistan used American detectors to intercept radioactive materials from Kazakhstan destined for the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.¹⁰

In March 17, 1999, testimony to Congress, former NIS Ambassador-at-Large Stephen Sestanovich summed up the Clinton administration's policy toward Central Asia as pursuing four interrelated goals: (1) democratization;(2) market-oriented reform; (3) greater integration with western political and military institutions; and (4) responsible security policies on nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, and drug trafficking. Sestanovich noted that securing the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Central Asian states was the cornerstone of U.S. policy.¹¹

The Clinton administration's national security strategy elaborated on the security interests underpinning U.S. policy toward Central Asia. These included establishing the rule of law in an effort to combat crime and corruption, creating a stable environment for energy exports (as a part of a broader U.S. interest in diversifying energy supplies), reducing regional threats (nonproliferation, terrorism), and

developing regional cooperation to encourage the Central Asian states to support one another in the event of instability or threats to peace.¹²

Congress reaffirmed the United States commitment to military engagement with Central Asia with the passage on March 10, 1999, of the Silk Road Strategy Act, which amended the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to support the economic and political independence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus and promote regional reconciliation, cooperation, and economic development. The new legislation provided for border control assistance to facilitate interdiction of drug trafficking, nonproliferation, and transnational criminal activities, as well as for humanitarian assistance to victims of conflicts in the region, and assistance for the development of free market economies and associated infrastructure.¹³ Anti-terrorism became a more explicit component of U.S. policy toward Central Asia in the aftermath of armed incursions by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan into Kyrgyzstan in July-August 1999.

In April 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced a new Central Asian Border Security Initiative (CASI), which provided \$3 million in additional security assistance to each of the Central Asian states, initially to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and later to Turkmenistan and Tajikistan as well. After further IMU attacks in Uzbekistan in August 2000, during which several Americans were held hostage, the State Department included the IMU, linked to Osama bin Laden, in its list of foreign terrorist organizations in September 2000.¹⁴ In its initial year in office, the Bush administration maintained the core components of the Clinton policy toward Central Asia (regional security, political and economic reform), while further accentuating the importance of energy development.¹⁵

Yet, at the same time as Central Asia's importance increased for energy development and counterterrorism

efforts, by the end of the decade, U.S. policymakers, especially in Congress,¹⁶ became increasingly disappointed by the lack of progress toward democratization, particularly in Kyrgyzstan, and by Uzbekistan's continuing deplorable human rights record.

Post-9/11 Policy Shifts.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, anti-terrorism became the defining principle of U.S. foreign policy, resulting in a major reshuffling of Washington's foreign relations.¹⁷ On the 6-month anniversary of the attacks, Bush stated that the United States response depended on the "critical support" of countries such as Pakistan and Uzbekistan, a remarkable turnaround considering that up until September 11 sanctions had been imposed on Pakistan (and India) due to their 1998 nuclear tests and Uzbekistan had been criticized sharply for its poor human rights record.¹⁸

In Central Asia the change in U.S. priorities was felt immediately, as Uzbekistan, in particular, and to a lesser extent Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan suddenly became frontline states in the U.S.-led struggle against the Taliban and the Al Qaeda network. Top U.S. officials streamed through Central Asian capitals. Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov and Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev both held summit meetings with President Bush.

In testimony to a newly created Senate Foreign Relations Sub-Committee on Central Asia and the Caucasus (its formation in itself a testament to the increasing importance of the region for U.S. foreign policy), Assistant Secretary of State A. Elizabeth Jones hailed the important role the Central Asian states played in providing a corridor for shipments of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan and in supporting coalition anti-terrorism efforts. She outlined three sets of long-term interests the United States would continue to pursue in the region: (1) preventing the

spread of terrorism; (2) assisting the Central Asian states with economic and political reform and the rule of law, and (3) ensuring the security and transparent development of Caspian energy resources.¹⁹

Central Asian states, which had received a relatively small share of U.S. assistance funds for the former Soviet Union, saw their support increased across the board due to emergency supplemental appropriations to facilitate their participation in anti-terrorism activities. In 2001, Uzbekistan gained the most from the additional funding, receiving an extra \$25 million in foreign military financing (FMF), \$18 million in nonproliferation, anti-terrorism, demining, and related programs (NADR), and \$40.5 million in Freedom Support Act (FSA) funds. Despite the new American largesse with respect to Uzbekistan, the Senate succeeded in including an amendment to the Foreign Appropriations Act on October 24, 2001, requiring the State Department to report to Congress every 6 months on Uzbekistan's use of U.S. military assistance and human rights violations.²⁰

The war against terrorism also led to a fundamental change in U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan, which received an additional \$3 million in NADR funding in FY 2001. In an effort to facilitate military cooperation with that country, the Senate amended U.S. legislation prohibiting any American aid to Azerbaijan (with the exception of funds for disarmament programs) until its government takes real steps to end all blockades and use of force against the Armenian enclave in Nagorno-Karabakh. The foreign appropriations bill passed on October 24, 2001 gives the president the authority to waive any restrictions on aid to Azerbaijan if he determines it is in the national interest to do so. The Bush administration requested \$50 million for Azerbaijan in FY2002 and \$52.98 million in FY 2003, including \$3 million in FMF, \$750,000 in International Military Education and Training (IMET) and \$46 million in FSA funding.

At the same time, the Bush administration began a reappraisal of the roles of the great powers in Central Asia, a process with significant implications for the region's geopolitics. U.S. assessments of Russia's role in Central Asia always depended on the level of cooperation in U.S.-Russia relations. During the Clinton administration, for example, the National Security strategy noted that the fate of Central Asia would depend on the prospects for reform in Russia.²¹ Reflecting the initial skepticism of the Bush administration about Russia, a U.S. official told Congress that Washington had an interest in preventing ties with Russia from complicating U.S. policy toward Central Asia and in cooperating where Moscow and Washington had common interests, for instance, in the United States-Russia Working Group on Afghanistan.²²

Since 9/11, U.S.-Russia cooperation has improved dramatically, facilitating the expanding U.S. security role in Central Asia. Despite Washington's wariness of China, China has proved a cooperative partner in persuading Pakistan to work closely with the United States in the anti-terrorism struggle, sharing intelligence and financial information about terrorist groups.

Moreover, even though in its first year in office the Bush administration displayed hostility to multilateralism, since 9/11 there has been a new awareness of the importance of regional and international organizations in integrating Central Asia within Western institutions and in facilitating regional anti-terrorism initiatives. Indeed, in the months since 9/11, the United States has sought to combat transnational threats such as terrorism by seeking to bring together states sharing U.S. values.²³ Although the anti-terrorism coalition was formed to fight the Taliban and the Al Qaeda network, there is debate in the administration regarding the type of security architecture necessary to address future security needs.

Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Jones noted that the countries of Central Asia "will

play a critical role” in the campaign against terrorism, but will require the support of organizations such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).²⁴

On December 13-14, 2001, OSCE held an international conference in Bishkek on enhancing security and stability in Central Asia and strengthening efforts to counter terrorism. In particular, the conference focused on preventative measures, such as democratization, economic development, crime prevention, and border control. In his comments to the OSCE Permanent Council on December 20, 2001, U.S. Ambassador to OSCE Stephen Minikes noted the importance of creating the social, economic, and political conditions under which terrorism cannot thrive and called upon the OSCE to take concrete steps, such as denying terrorists access to funding and improving cooperation among law enforcement agencies.²⁵

U.S. Military Engagement in Central Asia.

As policymakers have defined U.S. security interests in Central Asia, the United States military has taken a series of steps to engage Central Asia and enhance military-to-military cooperation. Reflecting the initial focus on Kazakhstan as the cornerstone of U.S. security in Central Asia, the United States and Kazakhstan signed a defense cooperation agreement in 1994, which was to involve dialogue on defense doctrine, training, and budgets. A subsequent agreement in 1997 expanded U.S. military cooperation with Kazakhstan to include nuclear security and defense conversion assistance. In recognition of Uzbekistan’s increasing importance in regional counterterrorism efforts, similar agreements were signed with Uzbekistan, which, in 2000 also became the first recipient of a sizeable transfer of military equipment under the Foreign Military Financing program.²⁶ It was not until 2001 that the United States began to appreciate the

importance of stability in Tajikistan and the coalition government's vulnerability to Islamic militant groups. During a May 2001 visit to Dushanbe, General Tommy Franks, General Anthony Zinni's successor as head of Central Command (CENTCOM), called Tajikistan "a strategically important country" and promised security assistance. Tajikistan then committed to joining NATO's Partnership for Peace Program.²⁷

Expanding U.S. military engagement with Central Asian States has been viewed as a key mechanism to promote their integration into Western political-military institutions, encourage civilian control over militaries, and institutionalize cooperative relations with the United States military, while dissuading other regional powers—especially Russia, China, and Iran—from seeking to dominate the region.²⁸ Beginning in 1993, military officials from Central Asia began to receive training at the George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch, Germany, as a part of a German-American security initiative.²⁹ By mid-1994, all of the Central Asian states with the exception of Tajikistan, had joined NATO's PfP program. The program hosted a series of exercises to provide training in peacekeeping activities and develop interoperability. Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan participated in Operation NUGGET exercises in peacekeeping tactics for land forces, which took place in August 1995 and in July 1997 at Fort Polk, Louisiana, the latter with Kazakhstan's participation. The three also took part in a multicountry amphibious exercise in North Carolina, along with the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, and 16 other PfP members. In March 2001, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan joined the United States, five other NATO countries, and 13 PfP members in exercises in Nova Scotia.³⁰

In December 1995, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan formed a joint peacekeeping unit, with the support of CENTCOM. The new unit, Centrazbat, was created to maintain stability in Central Asia and enable the three participating states to share information about tactics

in support of their bid to join U.N. peacekeeping missions. Centrazbat exercises have been held annually, with the participation of the United States,³¹ other NATO members, and regional states, since 1997, with an alternating focus on field and command training.

On October 1, 1999, CENTCOM assumed responsibility for the five Central Asian states, which, as former Soviet republics, previously fell under the purview of the European Command. According to former CENTCOM Commander General Zinni, it was essential to integrate these states into CENTCOM's overall collective engagement strategy, based on the premise that "an ounce of proactive engagement protection is cheaper than a pound of war fighting cure."³²

Thus, the United States supported efforts such as Centrazbat to promote regional stability and deter efforts by extremists to create instability. Marine Corps Brigadier General Martin R. Berndt noted, not long after the formation of the joint battalion, that another rationale for U.S. participation in Centrazbat was to create working relationships between U.S. forces and Central Asian militaries prior to the eruption of a crisis requiring their joint efforts.³³

The 2001 exercise was held at a U.S. military base in Germany and focused on regional cooperation. Exercises were cancelled for 2002 due to ongoing cooperation with Central Asian militaries as a part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, but are likely to be continued in future years.³⁴

New Challenges and U.S. Military Responses.

In October 2001, the U.S. Department of Defense's Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) summarized many of the general principles underlying U.S. security interests, which clearly are underpinning U.S. diplomatic overtures and military engagement with Central Asia: preventing the hostile domination of key areas and maintaining a stable balance of power; maintaining access to key markets and

strategic resources; addressing threats from territories of weak states; sustaining coalitions; and preparing to intervene in unexpected crises.³⁵ The document noted the emergence of Asia as a region especially vulnerable to military conflict and characterized it as an “arc of instability,” due to the area’s volatile mix of rising and declining powers, and the presence of radical and extremist movements, many of which have substantial military capabilities and the potential to develop weapons of mass destruction.³⁶

The QDR outlined a shift in defense planning, from the traditional threat-based model to a capabilities-based approach. Instead of focusing on identifying potential adversaries or areas of conflict, the new model of defense planning seeks to “anticipate the capabilities that an adversary might employ to coerce its neighbors, deter the United States from acting in defense of its allies and friends, or directly attack the United States or its deployed forces.”³⁷ Specifically, the QDR emphasizes the importance of preparing forward deployed forces for a variety of contingencies worldwide by expanding basing options beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, and securing temporary access to facilities for training and exercises in areas where the United States lacks bases.³⁸ The QDR also calls for strengthening U.S. alliances and partnerships by increasing peacetime training and preparations for coalition operations.³⁹

The QDR purports to transform American defense to incorporate new technologies and adapt existing capabilities to a changeable strategic environment. Operationally, this will require the U.S. military to protect U.S. military assets at home and overseas, project and sustain forces in distant hostile environments, maintain secure information systems, employ means necessary to deny sanctuary to enemies (intelligence, surveillance, tracking, military engagement), and develop joint operations and survivable space systems.⁴⁰

In particular, the U.S. Army is called upon to accelerate the introduction of forward-stationed Interim Brigade Combat Teams (IBCT). In October 1999, prior to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's review of U.S. military strategy culminating in the 2001 QDR,⁴¹ Army Chief of Staff General Eric Shinseki proposed creating six ICBTs to improve rapid power projection capacity. The ICBTs form the core of an interim force, the near-term component of a 30-year strategy to shape the Army into a more responsive and maneuverable force.⁴² In a November 2001 speech, General Shinseki noted that current operations in Central Asia reinforce the importance of acquiring a capability to project conventional war-fighting power in remote areas with inadequate infrastructure.⁴³

As a part of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, the U.S. military's involvement in Central Asia and the Caucasus expanded to include: temporary forward basing in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan; access to airspace and restricted use of bases in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; train and equip missions in Georgia; assistance for border security in Azerbaijan; and coalition-building by high-level visits to Central Asia, intelligence-sharing, improved coordination within CENTCOM, and increased assistance.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, U.S. officials pressed Central Asian states for assistance with the struggle against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Initially the Central Asian states reacted cautiously to American requests. Nevertheless, all five states offered to share intelligence and grant U.S. access to their air space. Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan also allowed coalition aircraft to make emergency landings.⁴⁴ Uzbekistan pledged the use of the Karshi Khanabad air base, as long as it would not be involved in positioning ground troops for an invasion of Afghanistan.⁴⁵

Tajikistan offered the use of its air space and territory to the U.S. military, but had to backtrack due to pressure from

Russia, which continues to station 7,000 troops from the 201st division and another 11,000 border guards in the country. After Russia withdrew its opposition, Tajikistan offered the Pentagon (and later the French military) the use of the Dushanbe airport on a contingency basis.⁴⁶

Although the coalition government, which includes Islamic parties, feared the domestic consequences of close military cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition effort against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, on November 3, 2001, Tajikistan's leaders and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld reached an agreement to allow the United States to consider using three additional bases (Khujand, Kurgan-Tyube, and Kulyab) in exchange for a substantial increase in aid.⁴⁷ Ultimately 35 U.S., French, and Italian warplanes were deployed at Kulyab, deemed the most suitable for immediate use.⁴⁸

These arrangements were kept private in the interest of Tajikistan's security, but access to basing in the country's south would prove significant to coalition efforts by providing a land bridge to northern Afghanistan and enabling aircraft located there to fly multiple missions daily and reach their targets within an hour.⁴⁹ By April 2002, the United States was providing military equipment to Tajikistan.⁵⁰

After Rumsfeld visited Tashkent, on October 5, 2001, Uzbekistan signed an agreement with U.S. officials allowing a limited number of U.S. military personnel (not more than 1,500 troops) to operate out of the Khanabad airbase in exchange for security guarantees and U.S. agreement to target training camps in Afghanistan, known to harbor the IMU.⁵¹ The agreement also provided for intelligence sharing and U.S. use of Uzbekistan's airspace. Uzbek officials reportedly stipulated that aircraft based at Khanabad would be used primarily for humanitarian and search-and-rescue attacks.⁵² Uzbek President Karimov stated that no negotiations regarding the time frame of the U.S. military presence had taken place.⁵³

CENTCOM and Uzbekistan have been cooperating closely. In December 2001, five Uzbek representatives were posted to CENTCOM.⁵⁴ During CENTCOM Commander General Tommy Frank's visit to Uzbekistan in January 2002, CENTCOM and the Ministry of Defense of Uzbekistan signed an agreement to develop military-to-military cooperation through joint seminars, training, and partnerships with U.S. units.⁵⁵

During his March 2002 visit to Washington, Karimov told reporters that "the United States may remain in Uzbekistan as long as they think it's necessary; in other words, as long as it takes to finish disrupting the terrorist network."⁵⁶ In return, in agreements codifying a strategic partnership with Uzbekistan, the United States pledged to "regard with grave concern any external threat to Uzbekistan."⁵⁷

In contrast to the largely secret agreements the U.S. military concluded with Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, on December 5, 2001 the United States Department of State and Kyrgyz officials signed a basing access agreement allowing U.S. forces to use Manas airport. The agreement allows for basing rights for Western forces for a 1-year period, which President Askar Akayev has termed "the optimal duration."⁵⁸ Kyrgyz Security Council Secretary Misir Ashirkulov stated that these forces would remain at Manas only as long as operations continue in Afghanistan, and basing rights will only be extended beyond 2002 if these operations take longer than expected.⁵⁹ Australian, French, Italian, Dutch, Norwegian, Korean, and Spanish aircraft also will use Manas, bringing the total number of foreign forces to approximately 3,000.⁶⁰

The U.S. military also expanded cooperation with Georgia and Azerbaijan in the aftermath of 9/11. Under a U.S. train and equip program, 2000 elite Georgian troops will be trained in counterterrorism tactics. Although the United States has provided Georgia with significant amounts of military equipment and training over the course

of the past decade, the new effort launched in March 2002 came at a time when Russia was threatening to intervene militarily in Georgia in pursuit of Al Qaeda operatives who allegedly fled to the Pankisi Gorge.⁶¹

Azerbaijan reportedly has provided its airbases for coalition refueling en route to Central Asia since October 2001. By removing Azerbaijan (as well as Armenia) from the list of countries barred from receiving U.S. military and security assistance, the U.S. Government is laying the foundation for increased military cooperation with the Caucasus. In late March, Azerbaijani defense officials signed the country's first security agreement with the United States, under which the Pentagon would provide assistance with air traffic control and safety, military and peace-keeping training, enhancing naval border control, and upgrading military airports.⁶²

Challenges for the U.S. Military.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz has noted that the U.S. bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan "may be more political than actually military," i.e. they symbolize the U.S. security commitment to these states and Washington's intention to protect them from future terrorist threats.⁶³ Nevertheless, the extension of basing beyond the conflict in Afghanistan will have uncertain political costs and may exacerbate regional geopolitical rivalries and instability.

Washington's ability to take the lead in protecting the security of Central Asia, a region where the United States previously has shown little inclination to intervene militarily, reflects the weakness of the existing regional security organizations and new cooperative trends in U.S. relations with great powers in the region. How long these cooperative trends will endure will depend on a variety of inter-related factors, including the timeframe of the U.S. military presence in Central Asia, the reactions of regional powers to the growing U.S. security interests in Central

Asia, and the scope of the United States anti-terrorism campaign, particularly its extension to Iraq.

Weak Regional Institutions.

In the past decade several regional organizations have developed in Central Asia to address transnational threats and promote economic cooperation. After the collapse of the USSR, China and Russia began convening regular meetings with their Central Asian neighbors, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, to discuss confidence-building along their common borders. After a meeting in June 1996 in Shanghai, the group became known as the Shanghai Five and signed a number of agreements, paving the way for bilateral border negotiations and regional economic cooperation.⁶⁴

At the group's June 2001 meeting members decided to create a formal institutional framework for their meetings, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China has sought to play a leading role in the SCO and promote economic cooperation among its members, in an effort to counterbalance growing U.S. economic interests in Central Asia, particularly in the energy sector.⁶⁵ Reflecting the broadening of the group's mandate, in June 2001 Uzbekistan joined the group, and subsequently other regional states, including Mongolia, Pakistan, and India, have expressed interest in membership.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States, the Central Asian members were quick to cooperate with Washington in the war against the Taliban and the SCO proved ineffective beyond issuing joint statements against terrorism. Although, members signed an organizational charter at the June 2002 meeting in St. Petersburg, and agreed to establish a permanent secretariat in Beijing and an anti-terrorism unit in Bishkek, they remain divided over the SCO's priorities.⁶⁶

Initially, there was some reason to believe that cooperation in the U.S.-led coalition would reinvigorate GUUAM—the grouping including Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova—due to Uzbekistan’s close partnership with Washington, increasing U.S. military assistance to Georgia, and the development of security ties to Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, member states have preferred to develop their bilateral ties with the United States. Uzbekistan, for example, withdrew from the grouping due its “lack of progress” in addressing key issues.⁶⁷

Even though existing regional groupings have yet to prove effective, a new Asian security organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), was founded on June 4, 2002, to bring together representatives from Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East to promote regional economic cooperation and security.⁶⁸

Kazakhstan’s President Nazarbayev had been advocating the creation of such an organization for more than a decade and its first meeting was held in Almaty.⁶⁹ Kazakh officials noted that the new group could play a role in addressing key regional issues, such as terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration, and water resource management, although they expected CICA to face greater obstacles in achieving consensus due to the diversity of membership.⁷⁰ The first session concluded with the signing of the Almaty Act, an appeal to the 16 participants (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Palestinian Authority, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan) to join forces against terrorism.⁷¹

Although both Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharaff and India’s Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee attended the conference, they refused to meet under its auspices and U.S. shuttle diplomacy ended up playing a key role in reducing tensions between the two neighbors over Kashmir.

Despite its initial ineffectiveness in conflict resolution, CICA is poised to play a role in facilitating bilateral contacts among some of its members. Just prior to the meeting, for example, India and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on military cooperation and discussed potential cooperation in energy, transportation, and pharmaceuticals.⁷²

Regional security has been difficult to ensure, even when goals are more narrowly focused, as the case of the “6+2” working group, established under U.N. auspices to promote a region-wide solution to the conflict in Afghanistan attests. The group was set up in August 1997 after Uzbekistan suggested that the U.N. form a contact group on Afghanistan to include its neighbors (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Iran, and Pakistan) plus the United States and Russia. Although previously not effective in finding a solution to Afghanistan’s security problems, 6+2 provides an interesting model of a regional security organization geared to resolution of a specific conflict.⁷³ It is also the only group in Central Asia inviting U.S. participation.

Great Power Cooperation: Driving Forces and Fault-lines.

In the absence of effective regional institutions, U.S. bilateral diplomacy with China and Russia has proved important in addressing growing U.S. security interests in Central Asia. In the case of China, cooperation in the anti-terrorism coalition has provided an impetus for more frequent communication and enabled the two countries to put tensions over the April 2001 spy plane incident behind them.⁷⁴ Initially Chinese leaders believed that the U.S. focus on anti-terrorism coalition-building would counter unilateralist trends and reduce the focus on China as a potential threat to U.S. interests in Asia. China also saw an opportunity to find a new area of cooperation with the United States, despite reservations about the use of military force in response to the 9/11 attacks, and hoped

that Chinese cooperation with the United States would result in concessions on Taiwan and support for Chinese policies to combat Uighur separatism.⁷⁵ In an effort to avoid condoning U.S. intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries, Chinese officials have stressed the importance of establishing “concrete evidence” before intervening militarily and operating within the U.N. framework.⁷⁶ They have been quite clear about China’s opposition to the “willful expansion of the war against terror” to Iraq or other countries the United States has chosen to include in the “axis of evil” rubric.⁷⁷

Chinese leaders are concerned about the security implications of a long-term U.S. military presence in South and Central Asia and enhanced U.S. military cooperation with Southeast Asian states. Nevertheless, since 9/11 China has shared information about financial flows of suspected terrorist groups, held talks with U.S. officials about coordinating anti-terrorism activities, provided humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, and urged its ally, Pakistan, to assist the U.S.-led coalition and reduce tensions in Kashmir. In addition to providing a new issue area for cooperation with the United States, Chinese officials view their participation in the anti-terrorism coalition as justifying an intensified crackdown on Uighur separatists, whom Beijing alleges have received training from Al Qaeda camps.⁷⁸

Although the anti-terrorism struggle has provided new impetus for U.S.-China cooperation, China’s security environment has deteriorated since 9/11 as Chinese leaders saw key allies, such as Russia and Pakistan, tilt toward the United States; relations between Washington and India improve; U.S. military cooperation with Southeast Asian states increase; instability along China’s western borders deepen; the United States confirm for Chinese leaders Washington’s increasing aspiration for global dominance by revising the United States nuclear posture and national security strategy; Japanese officials discuss a nuclear option; and the U.S. military establish bases for the first

time in Central Asia. These dramatic shifts in global politics have prompted Chinese experts to reevaluate the strategic context of China's security policy and discuss various possible responses, including greater reliance on multilateral cooperation (to counteract perceived U.S. unilateralist tendencies) or a "readjustment" of China's security policy in response to mounting U.S. pressures.⁷⁹

Given that this series of negative developments in China's security environment has developed at a time when Chinese leaders have been preoccupied by leadership succession, thus far they have focused their attention on their overriding current concern in U.S.-China relations, the Taiwan issue, and have not directly criticized the U.S. military presence in Central Asia. Nonetheless, Chinese commentary emphasizes that Central Asia is likely to be the locus of great power rivalry, especially over energy.⁸⁰

Chinese leaders have responded to the increased U.S. military cooperation with Central Asia by reinvigorating Chinese diplomacy in the region and advocating cooperation in regional security frameworks, excluding U.S. participation, a surprising development considering Beijing's usual caution about multilateralism. Jiang Zemin held bilateral talks with Central Asian leaders in connection with the meetings of CICA in Almaty in May 2002 and of the SCO in Petersburg in June 2002. According to Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, Jiang's Eurasian initiative was a "major diplomatic move" to respond to profound changes in the international security environment of the region.⁸¹ Jiang used these meetings to put forward a vision of Central Asian security maintained by Asians.⁸² In the short term, China is seeking to expand economic cooperation with Kazakhstan in the energy sector and to boost security ties with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan by providing military aid.⁸³

Considering Russia's historical ties to the region, the substantial investment the United States has been making there since 9/11, and the wary reaction in Central Asia to

Beijing's inroads, Chinese diplomatic efforts are unlikely to bear fruit. While the Kazakh leadership is interested in economic cooperation with China, there is concern in Kazakhstan about the potential for Chinese economic domination.⁸⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, the border demarcation with China, involving the return of territory, sparked mass demonstrations in March 2002 and opposition by the parliament. Public opinion polling in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan reveals considerable distrust of China's intentions in the region: 56% in Kyrgyzstan, 40% in Uzbekistan, and 52% in Kazakhstan stated that China could not be trusted to act responsibly in Central Asia.⁸⁵

Instead China is likely to seek to boost its own military might, and extend its economic influence in Central Asia and Southeast Asia. According to a Russian analysis, one of the reasons behind China's decision to purchase eight diesel Kilo-class submarines was to protect Chinese interests in Southeast Asia against further U.S. encroachments, as Beijing is convinced that the United States will seek to take over the Russian base at the Cam Ranh Bay naval base.⁸⁶

Chinese cooperation with the U.S.-led coalition has provided important support, but China's role has been limited compared to Russia's. Without a cooperative U.S.-Russian relationship, President Putin's acquiescence to an American military presence in Moscow's sphere of influence would have been hard to imagine.⁸⁷

Although Putin was the first leader to offer moral support after the 9/11 attacks, it was the Central Asian states who pushed Russia into greater cooperation with the anti-terrorism effort than might otherwise have been forthcoming.⁸⁸ Initially Russian leaders opposed any U.S. use of bases in Central Asia. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov stated that he failed to see any "reasons whatsoever, even hypothetical, for any suppositions about conducting NATO operations from territories of Central Asian countries, members of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States]."⁸⁹ At first President Putin tried to pressure the

Central Asian leaders to follow Moscow's lead, by telephoning them on September 17 and urging them to act according to the CIS framework on anti-terrorism issues.

Although initially seeking Moscow's approval, U.S. officials then went directly to the Central Asian leaders to seek their support. Uzbekistan is not a member of the CIS and extended the use of its bases to the U.S.-led coalition. Kazakhstan, and then Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, after securing Moscow's approval, also opened up bases and offered their air space for the coalition's use. Russian officials were then obliged to reverse their previous opposition to U.S. basing in Central Asia.⁹⁰ Putin, who kept silent on the matter for nearly two weeks, gave a speech on September 24, 2001 in which he pledged Russia's cooperation with U.S. plans to attack Afghanistan, but only once the U.N. Security Council had approved them.⁹¹

For Putin, the 9/11 events represented an opportunity to rejoin the superpower club. By participating in the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition, closing bases in Vietnam and Cuba (albeit in decisions made prior to 9/11) and taking a conciliatory stance on President Bush's December 13, 2002 decision to withdraw from the ABM treaty, Putin hoped that the United States would once again see the need to treat Russia as a great power.⁹² The Russian president also expected some concessions in return, especially an end to criticism of Russia's policies toward Chechnya, *carte blanche* to conduct anti-terrorism operations in Georgia, and perhaps also preferential terms for repayment of Soviet era debt and World Trade Organization (WTO) entry.⁹³

Russian cooperation in the anti-terrorism coalition has been wide-ranging, including sharing intelligence about the Taliban, offering the use of Russian air space, providing humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, and supporting the Northern Alliance. To coordinate their activities, Russian and U.S. officials are meeting in a wide range of venues. Russia dispatched representatives to CENTCOM. On October 19, 2001, the United States and Russia held

consultations on Central Asia for the first time. The United States and Russia are cooperating on Afghanistan and regional anti-terrorism issues in a joint working group on counter-terrorism, established in 2000, the U.S.-Russia working group on Afghanistan, the 6+2 framework, and the Russia-NATO Council, formed in December 2001.

American officials choose to emphasize the positive post-9/11 U.S.-Russia relations. General Franks has noted the intersection of U.S. and Russian interests in Central Asia.⁹⁴ Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jones has called attention to the “extraordinary cooperation with Russia in a region . . . that Russia naturally regards as its own backyard.”⁹⁵ Yet Putin’s initial failure to show substantial immediate benefits for Russian cooperation with Washington on Afghanistan and underlying wariness of an increased American military presence in Central Asia made the Russian leader vulnerable to more nationalist critics at home in early 2002. Prior to 9/11, Russian policymakers were already suspicious of U.S. intentions in Central Asia and concerned that Washington was using programs such as PfP to squeeze Russia out of the region.⁹⁶

By early 2002, after the United States concluded basing agreements with Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, critical voices began to be heard in Moscow. In January 2002, Gennady Seleznev, speaker of the Russian Duma, spoke out against any permanent U.S. basing in Central Asia.⁹⁷ Moscow newspapers lamented Russia’s loss of influence in the region.⁹⁸

The Russian public also proved skeptical. A ROMIR poll taken in October 2001 showed that 63.5% of Russians were opposed to U.S. access to bases in Central Asia, with 39.8% in favor.⁹⁹ According to a November 2001 poll by the Russian Center for Public Opinion, only 20% of Russians saw fundamental change in U.S.-Russia relations resulting from Russian participation in the anti-terrorism coalition.¹⁰⁰

The Russian leader's immediate concern has been to recoup Russia's dwindling clout in the region through a series of diplomatic initiatives. In October 2001, the Kremlin unsuccessfully sought to coordinate intelligence sharing between the Central Asian states and the United States in an effort to control their cooperation.¹⁰¹ At a December 2001 CIS summit, Putin emphasized that 9/11 highlighted the importance of multilateral cooperation and noted that "the tragic events of September 11 showed how vulnerable a country is on its own—even a country that is very powerful, economically and militarily."¹⁰² In his State-of-the-Nation speech on April 18, 2002, the Russian president sought to give the entire credit to the CIS—without even mentioning the United States role—for success in the struggle against terrorism in Afghanistan.¹⁰³ At the May 2002 CIS summit, Putin proposed creating a joint military body, which would be commanded by the Russian Chief of the General Staff Kvashin, but no agreement was reached on the issue. Nevertheless, signatories to the collective security treaty formed a new collective security organization, which would ensure regional security and cooperate with other organizations, such as NATO and the SCO.¹⁰⁴

Many Russian appeals to enhance CIS integration have largely fallen on deaf ears and Putin has sought a variety of other economic and political levers of influence. In January 2002, the Russian president called for the formation of a Eurasian gas alliance, including Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia. The alliance would export gas to Europe via the Russian state-owned monopoly Gazprom, effectively granting Moscow the power to cut off exports from Central Asian states should they fail to be sufficiently loyal to Moscow.¹⁰⁵ At the SCO summit, Putin called attention to a 15-year agreement to export oil from Kazakhstan via Russia and noted the recent improvement in trade relations with Uzbekistan.¹⁰⁶ Later on in June, when Kyrgyzstan's President Akayev faced continuous mass demonstrations protesting the treatment of an

opposition figure and the border settlement with China, top Russian officials were dispatched to Bishkek to show their support for the embattled president and offered to improve military cooperation with Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰⁷

Moreover, Russia has been competing with the United States for influence in Afghanistan, a development that some observers have compared to the great power rivalry in Europe right before the fall of Berlin in 1945. Although Russia did not contribute troops to the war against the Taliban, Moscow dispatched twelve planeloads of ‘specialists’ to Kabul in early December, a move described by Secretary of State Colin Powell as potentially creating tensions in U.S.-Russia relations.¹⁰⁸ Russia was the second country (after Great Britain) to reopen its embassy in Kabul and its support for the Northern Alliance ensured it a key role in post-Taliban Afghanistan.¹⁰⁹

While it is true that the United States-Russian partnership has deepened in the spring of 2002, after successful arms control talks and a productive summit meeting in May, Russian support for the U.S.-led anti-terrorism coalition has never been unconditional. Above all, Russia fully expects the U.S. military presence in Central Asia to be temporary. Should basing rights be extended indefinitely, this would embolden latent opposition to Putin in the military and intelligence services in particular.

Furthermore, the expansion of the war on terrorism to Iraq would place the new Russian-American partnership under considerable stress. Although the Russian president may be able to tolerate limited air strikes, if the United States went forward with preemptive ground attack against Iraq,¹¹⁰ the Russian president would find himself in a very difficult position politically. After acquiescing to U.S. basing in Central Asia and a U.S. pull-out from the ABM treaty, Russia would be asked to sacrifice its economic interests in Iraq, a move unlikely to garner support in Russian policy circles and, to the contrary, one with the potential to

undermine Putin's support for U.S. policies on other issues. Prior consultation would be insufficient to achieve Russian concurrence to a preemptive U.S. ground attack, as Russian leaders would be expecting substantial financial compensation for their losses. Even so, if the United States intervened unilaterally in Iraq, domestic opposition in Russia to Putin's westward-leaning diplomacy would increase and, as was the case with the United States intervention in Kosovo in 1999, would strengthen voices in Moscow advocating a partnership with China and India to counteract Washington's efforts to impose its will on global affairs.

Deepening Domestic Instability in Central Asia.

Expanding U.S. military engagement with Central Asia is designed to shore up weak states that are vulnerable to terrorism, promote their integration into western institutions, provide support for moderate Islamic regimes, as well as to stabilize Afghanistan's immediate external environment.¹¹¹ Yet as Andrew Bacevich noted, "to venture into the steppes is to venture into a minefield."¹¹²

The largely secular regimes of Central Asia have faced challenges from radical Islamic movements within their borders, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Although the IMU had bases in Northern Afghanistan and links to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, the group mounted its 1999 and 2000 incursions into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from Tajikistan as a part of a broader effort to control drug trafficking routes within the Ferghana valley.¹¹³ Although the IMU's bases in Afghanistan were targeted during the Afghanistan war, the group has maintained an underground network in Central Asia and there is some evidence that IMU fighters from Afghanistan are seeking to return to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.¹¹⁴

Hizb-ut-Tahrir, founded in Jordan and Saudi Arabia in 1953, seeks to create a united Islamic super-state in Central

Asia, which would be ruled by sharia law. Although it does not advocate the overthrow of existing states by violent means and is not officially regarded as a terrorist group by the U.S.-led coalition or the Central Asian states, it is not allowed to register legally as a political party and operates mostly underground.¹¹⁵ As one of the few alternatives in a region where political opposition is repressed, the group has become increasingly popular, especially among the impoverished rural residents of Ferghana, where unemployment reaches 80%.¹¹⁶ Since the United States has been using the Manas base, Hizb-ut-Tahrir has been distributing leaflets opposing the American military presence.¹¹⁷

Although Central Asians are mainly moderate Sunni Muslims, repressive regimes, corrupt elites, and pervasive poverty have made the region a breeding ground for terrorists and other radical movements.¹¹⁸ The United States hoped that by developing the energy sector in these countries, overall increases in development would trickle down to the population, but corruption and lack of transparency have facilitated the formation of a criminalized elite, increasing public dissatisfaction with their own governments and cooperation with the West.¹¹⁹

The new military assistance money pouring into Central Asia since 9/11 is likely to exacerbate this problem. In Kyrgyzstan, the United States pays approximately \$7,000 per take-off from Manas, used for about 30 coalition flights daily, as well as \$1,000 per truck and \$500 per car entering the airport, plus \$3.5 million for helicopter parts and aircraft repairs.¹²⁰ Just as with oil revenue in Kazakhstan, corruption in Kyrgyzstan renders unlikely any fair distribution of these funds to impoverished citizens.

Uzbekistan has received the lion's share of increased funding post-9/11—nearly \$172 million—more than ten times the total amounts budgeted for each of the other Central Asian states in aid requests in FY2001-2003. In FY 2001 Uzbekistan was the only Central Asian country to

receive additional foreign military financing, in the amount of \$25 million, \$5 million more than NATO ally Turkey.¹²¹ NGOs have faulted the Bush administration for focusing excessively on security assistance to the detriment of other needs in Central Asia.¹²²

The increased U.S. military presence in Central Asia gives the public the impression that Washington supports these repressive regimes, while providing authoritarian leaders reason to hope that U.S. forces would back them up in case of a mass effort to oust them. The protest marches taking place in Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 2002, attracting thousands of supporters, could lead to a widespread movement to oust President Akayev,¹²³ a very real example of a situation in which the U.S. military presence appears to be supporting a less than democratic leader instead of encouraging the development of political pluralism. U.S. troops stationed in Central Asia also make good targets for anti-government insurgents and are as vulnerable as the weak states that host them.

U.S. policymakers are well aware that democratic and prosperous Central Asian states would provide the strongest bulwark against terrorism and are funding an impressive list of economic, social, and political programs in addition to military aid. Yet the emphasis has been on rewarding the Central Asian states for their cooperation and providing aid incentives for continued participation in the anti-terrorism coalition, rather than on using closer cooperation to encourage higher standards of economic and political openness.

Although prior to 9/11 U.S. policymakers highlighted the lack of progress toward democratization in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, the increasing consolidation of one-party rule in Tajikistan, and the continued erosion of democratic norms in Kyrgyzstan, many American officials now overstate the degree of progress currently taking place in these countries to make a case for continued close security cooperation. U.S. officials note that

Uzbekistan, for example, has taken some unprecedented steps—allowing a visit by the U.N. Rapporteur on Torture, permitting the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit detention centers, and registering one human rights organization.

According to Human Rights Watch, however, there is no reason to point to any fundamental change in the country's overall appalling human rights record, which includes inhumane treatment of prisoners, the use of torture in detention, tight restrictions on the media, and a continuing ban on independent parties and social movements. More than 7,000 remain imprisoned on religious and political charges.¹²⁴

Assured of U.S. support, President Karimov saw the opportunity to renege on a pre-9/11 pledge to release thousands of political prisoners: approximately 800 were released but kept under tight surveillance, while the rest lost their chance for amnesty.¹²⁵ Despite such evidence of backsliding, the U.S. Government removed Uzbekistan from the list of countries of particular concern for religious freedom, mandated by the 1998 U.S. International Religious Freedom Act.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, Muslim believers and the human rights personnel who defend them continue to be arrested in Uzbekistan on the pretext of their association with terrorists.

Enhanced cooperation with the United States in anti-terrorism is unlikely to secure integration of these states in western institutions and transform them into liberal democracies unless Washington establishes clear benchmarks for progress and links increases in aid, especially military assistance, to evidence of movement toward these goals. For its own part, the U.S. Government would have to make a much larger long-term commitment to assist these countries, especially in poverty reduction. Moreover, the June 2002 scare over the possible contamination of the Khanabad base in Uzbekistan by nerve gas left behind after the Soviets' departure showed

that greater assistance to the environmental health of Central Asia also should be viewed as a U.S. security interest.

Instead of the United States exerting leverage over Central Asia to move toward democratization, states like Uzbekistan have proven to be the tougher negotiators, as the debacle over the opening of Friendship Bridge demonstrated. The United States had urged Uzbekistan to open the 1km land link to Afghanistan in an effort to expedite delivery of humanitarian aid to hundreds of thousands of refugees living in desperate conditions there. Uzbekistan demurred for several months, citing security concerns. Consequently, the coalition had to resort to more time-consuming methods, such as shipping the supplies by river barge across the Amu-Darya or even by mule from Tajikistan. Finally it took a visit by Secretary of State Colin Powell to Uzbekistan in December, during which he pledged a long-term commitment to a cooperative relationship with Uzbekistan. After Powell's visit, Karimov agreed to reopen the bridge, closed since 1997, as soon as a last technical assessment was made.¹²⁷ Karimov's hard bargaining also delayed the initial entry of French troops destined for the Mazar-e-Sharif base in Afghanistan.¹²⁸

Although Central Asian leaders have sought out closer military cooperation with the United States and rebuffed Russian pressure for greater coordination of anti-terrorism cooperation within the CIS, public opinion surveys taken in Central Asia in the fall-winter 2001-2 indicate considerable popular opposition to the US military presence in the region. Majorities in three of four countries surveyed by local polling organizations hired by the United States government came out against a permanent U.S. military presence in the region: Azerbaijan (43% opposed, 20% in favor), Kazakhstan (77% opposed, 8% in favor) and Kyrgyzstan (72% opposed, 22% in favor). Only in Uzbekistan does a majority support a permanent U.S. military presence (61% in favor, 21% opposed).¹²⁹

Similarly, respondents in Kyrgyzstan were split on the wisdom of their government's decision to allow the basing of U.S. fighter planes in their country: 47% supported the policy, while 49.7% disagreed.¹³⁰ In Kazakhstan, 86% supported their government's decision to refuse basing rights to U.S. and coalition forces. In Uzbekistan, however, 82.4% of those surveyed supported their government's decision to allow U.S. forces to use Khanabad.

Nevertheless, all three Central Asian states are more comfortable with a greater United Nations role in peace-keeping in the region than with a U.S. military presence: 71.2% of respondents in Kazakhstan, 72.3% in Uzbekistan, and 82.1% in Kyrgyzstan expressed a preference for the U.N. alone or in cooperation with local Afghan groups to take charge of peace-keeping duties. Conversely, 10.6% in Kazakhstan supported a role for the West in cooperation with the UN, 7.5% in Uzbekistan, and 8.9% in Kyrgyzstan.¹³¹

Several factors explain Uzbekistan's greater receptivity to U.S. forces in the region. To some extent, public opinion reflects the preferences expressed in the region's media. Uzbekistan's government-controlled media were largely supportive of the U.S. military presence and intervention in Afghanistan, while coverage has been more skeptical in Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan and negative in Kazakhstan.¹³²

Only Uzbekistan appears to believe U.S. assurances that it will not maintain a permanent military presence in Central Asia (54%, with 21% disagreeing) while this pledge is disputed in Azerbaijan where 50% of respondents believe that the U.S. military will remain in the region (with 17% saying the United States will not) and in Kazakhstan (51% believe U.S. will stay, 35% disagree). Opinion was more evenly divided in Kyrgyzstan (40% say the United States will maintain a permanent military presence, 54% disagree).¹³³ Similarly, Uzbekistan is the only country of those surveyed with a majority believing that the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan was justified (71%,

compared to 45% for Kazakhstan, 50% for Kyrgyzstan, and 21% for Azerbaijan) and approving of the military campaign (79% compared to 20% for Azerbaijan, 39% for Kazakhstan, and 53% for Kyrgyzstan).¹³⁴

Although the greater U.S. security interest in fighting terrorism in Central Asia was a policy departure for Washington, elites in Kazakhstan, for example, see more continuity in their security environment. While not discounting the potential for terrorism in their region, elites interviewed in Kazakhstan in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 appeared to be more concerned about illegal drug trafficking (84%) and at least as much concerned about health and environmental problems (60%) as about the threat from terrorism (61%) and Islamic extremism (57%).¹³⁵

Opposition in some Central Asian states to a U.S. military presence in the region also reflects their concern about its impact on the regional balance of power. Respondents in Kyrgystan are the most wary of a shift in favor of Uzbekistan. When asked whether Uzbekistan's cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan indicates a U.S. preference for Tashkent, 44.1% said yes and 45.9% said no, compared to 29.7% and 53.8% for Kazakhstan. In results appearing to confirm regional fears, a majority of respondents in Uzbekistan interprets the new cooperation with the United States as a sign of preference (70.5% yes, 14% no).¹³⁶

Despite the new cooperative thrust in U.S.-Russian relations, an underlying rationale for U.S. security interests in Central Asia has been to prevent Russian domination. Polling of Central Asian publics reveals an understanding of this dynamic and opposition to it. When asked how much trust they have in various countries to address their region's problems, they placed the most trust in Russia (92% in Kyrgyzstan, 80% in Uzbekistan, and 76% in Kazakhstan). The U.N. came in second (77% in Kyrgyzstan, 74% in Uzbekistan, and 62% in Kazakhstan), while the United

States ranked third (68% in Kyrgyzstan, 74% in Uzbekistan, and 51% in Kazakhstan).¹³⁷ According to this polling research, majorities in these three Central Asian countries fear that a permanent U.S. presence will weaken Russian influence in the region (61% in Kyrgyzstan, 43% in Uzbekistan, and 48% in Kazakhstan) and that this would be bad for Central Asia (92% in Kyrgyzstan, 64% in Uzbekistan, and 67% in Kazakhstan).¹³⁸ This study concludes that support remains for Russia because its policies are more familiar and viewed as supporting stability, while U.S. motives remain less clear.¹³⁹ Other public opinion research has shown some discomfort with U.S. global policies and their potential impact on Central Asia.¹⁴⁰

Thus, U.S. policymakers should be wary of equating the self-interested cooperation by Central Asian leaders in the anti-terrorism coalition with public support for a U.S. military presence. For Central Asian publics, terrorism is just one of a long list of problems, dominated by concerns such as drug trafficking, poverty, and public health, while Central Asian leaders see the political value of overstating a terrorist threat to bring in the foreign military assistance needed to maintain their own power and repress political opponents.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations.

There is a danger that U.S. policy toward Central Asia may prove counterproductive: to defend the peace against terrorism, the United States has ended up cooperating with the very tyrants responsible for the repression that increases support for home-grown anti-government and transnational movements. With greater U.S. involvement in the region, popular expectations of change will rise, and should the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia fail to reform, social explosions may occur in the region, perpetuating instability and harming U.S. interests.¹⁴¹ While the United States should continue to provide military

assistance designed to provide border security and interdict narcotics and weapons trafficking, strict conditionality should be applied to ensure that the Central Asian states do not use American aid to further institutionalize social repression and instead are obliged to achieve clearly defined benchmarks in economic and political reform.

The U.S. military should withdraw completely from all Central Asian bases as soon as hostilities in Afghanistan end to avoid becoming a target or an inspiration for domestic anti-government or transnational terrorist movements. Instead, the U.S. military should focus its efforts on developing rapid deployment capabilities that could be located in existing bases in Turkey (Incirlik and Antalya). While U.S. forces remain in Central Asia, greater resources should be devoted to civil affairs projects and an effort should be made to rely as much as possible on local suppliers for base needs to provide some immediate socio-economic benefits to host communities.

Coordination in the development of military, economic, political, and economic assistance will help ensure that the goals of U.S. aid will be mutually supportive, but appropriate policies require a more detailed understanding of the region. In particular, the U.S. military should devote greater resources to foreign area training for Central Asia and develop a corps of experts with knowledge of Central Asian languages and background in Near East and Middle East studies, as well as CIS affairs.

Although anti-terrorism cooperation has dominated U.S. security interests in Central Asia since 9/11, over the long term domestic insurgencies within these states and inter-state rivalry will pose a greater threat to the region than transnational terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda.¹⁴² To avoid compounding instability in these states, the United States needs a regional strategy for Central Asia that addresses a wide range of potential sources of regional instability, including conflicts over water resource

management, border disputes, refugee issues, environmental concerns, and drug trafficking.¹⁴³

In particular, the United States should take care to avoid singling out Uzbekistan, admittedly a key partner in the anti-terrorism coalition, but a potential regional hegemon in Central Asia.¹⁴⁴ Since 9/11, the focus of U.S. security interests has shifted from Kazakhstan, the initial target of U.S. security aid due to proliferation concerns, to Uzbekistan, accentuating the rivalry between these two states and exposing weaker regional states such as Kyrgyzstan to Uzbek encroachments on its borders in the name of anti-terrorism activities.

With the successful conclusion of ENDURING FREEDOM, the United States government faces a choice of two vastly different policy directions. One would involve a unilateral strategy, based on self-defense and preemptive attack against terrorist groups and regimes, while the second would support continued multilateral collaboration against transnational threats.¹⁴⁵

A unilateral strategy would accentuate public suspicion of U.S. intentions in Central Asia and erode support in Russia and China for Washington's regional anti-terrorism efforts, potentially resurrecting regional initiatives aimed at minimizing the United States role in the region. Multilateral collaboration, on the other hand, would encourage the Central Asian militaries to work with each other and within the framework of western military and political institutions. To this end, intelligence-sharing, PFP and joint peace-keeping activities should be continued and greater training for Central Asian military and security officials should be provided. In deference to regional sensitivities, the United States should recognize its outsider status in Central Asia and work within existing regional structures, such as the 6+2 framework.

One of the key lessons of 9/11 is that despite its preponderant power, the United States remains vulnerable to transnational threats and requires the collaboration of

other states to combat them. In Central Asia, this will require a redefinition of U.S. security interests and development of a regional strategy that would address the interrelated nature of political, economic, and security problems in the region.

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