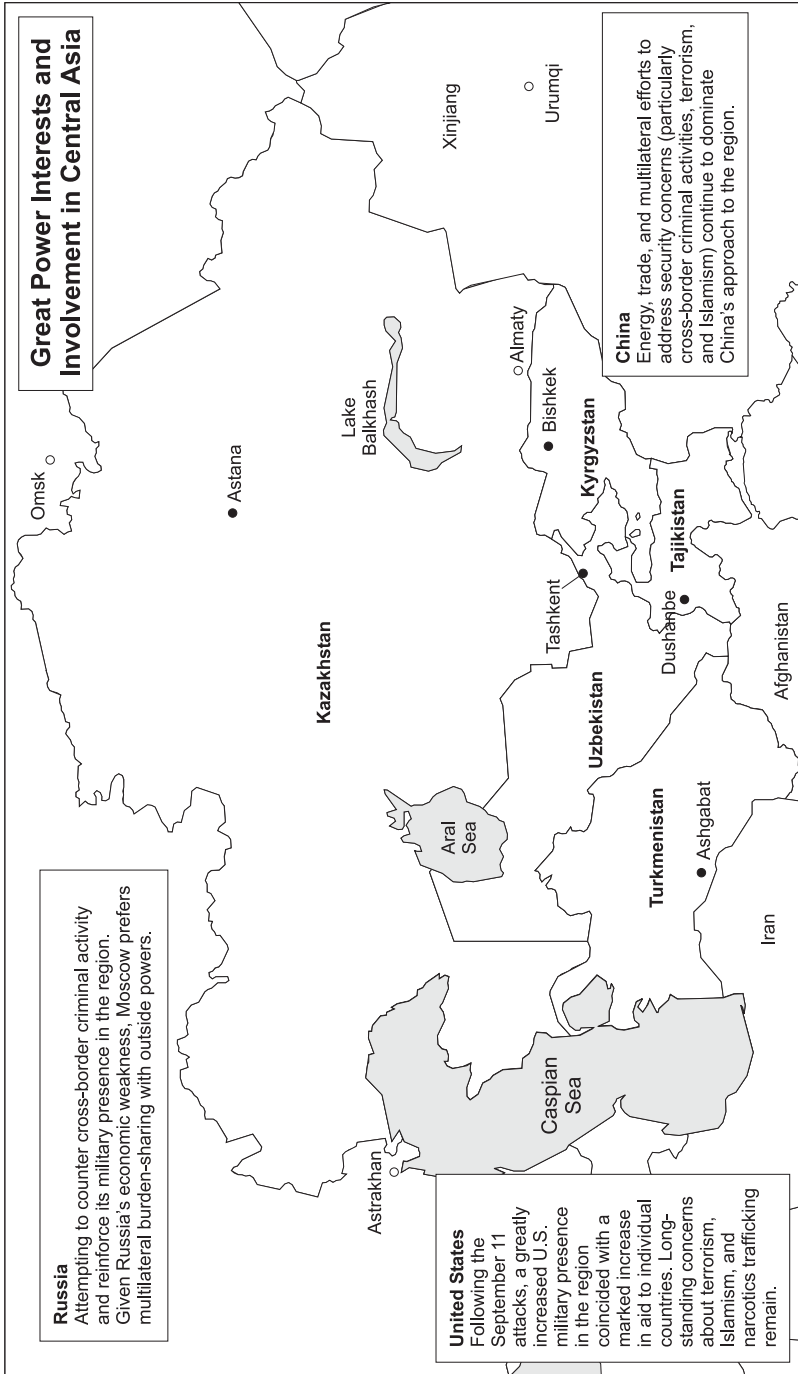


**Last page in chapter on Southeast Asia**



NBR based on Collins & Wohlforth "Defying 'Great Game' Expectations"

# DEFYING “GREAT GAME” EXPECTATIONS

*Kathleen A. Collins & William C. Wohlforth*

## ABSTRACT

Although widely expected to spark a new round of competitive rivalry among the major powers, the insertion of U.S. forces into Central Asia after September 11, 2001 had the opposite effect—relations among the United States, Russia, and China both regionally and globally have improved dramatically. This chapter addresses the question of whether this comparatively benign outcome is sustainable. It presents systematic evaluations of the outside powers’ chief interests, their actual behavior on the ground, and the Central Asian states’ responses. Contrary to the expectations generated by “great game” punditry on the region, we find that there are grounds for continued cooperation among the three large outside powers and that, with continued prudent management, their involvement in the region may foster rather than undermine stability.

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## Introduction

Often seen as an arena for a new “great game,” Central Asia was widely expected to undergo a new round of geopolitical rivalry after the United States entered the region in force following September 11.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to these expectations, relations among the United States, Russia and China both regionally and globally have improved dramatically. The fundamental question this chapter addresses is whether this state of affairs reflects a potential long-term outcome or just a temporary interlude in the great powers’ regional competition. In other words, to what degree does the “great game” lens capture the real dynamics of the major powers’ strategic interaction in Central Asia? To address this question, we present three distinct but mutually supporting analyses: a balance sheet of the major powers’ competitive versus their mutual interests in the region; an assessment of their behavior in the region after September 11 to determine whether it is consistent with our analysis of their interests; and an analysis of the Central Asian states’ response to the great powers’ actions, in order to compare their perceptions and behavior to our reading of the great powers’ role.

Our conclusion is that a new “great game” is not underway in Central Asia.<sup>2</sup> Although elements of rivalry and competition shadow some relationships, shared strategic interests dominate the concrete actions of the major powers to a remarkable degree. Sustaining this state of affairs is clearly in the United States’ interest, but it will require active management.

## The Great Powers’ Interests in Central Asia

The “great game” narrative features an intense struggle among all the major outside powers for spheres of influence and energy resources in Central Asia. The nature of this struggle is muted among the local great powers (Russia and China) mainly by their shared opposition to the United States’ global dominance and its regional presence.<sup>3</sup>

These themes do find reflection in reality. Great powers are always competitive to some extent as their foreign policies generally reflect a basic preference for more influence. Like their counterparts throughout history, officials in Washington, Moscow, and Beijing generally assume that more influence over international affairs is better than less, all other things being equal. To the degree that all players want more influence, their mutual interactions can be seen as a zero-sum game, since more influence for any one player must come at the expense of another. This generalization clearly applies to the major powers’ interests in Central Asia. American, Russian, and Chinese decision-makers clearly would prefer to have more say over military and economic developments in the region rather than less. Russian officials seek to stave off the further decline of their influence in the re-

gion, and with a growing economy and robust governmental finances, many see opportunities to make up for ground lost to China and the United States over recent years. Chinese policymakers see their state as a rising global and regional power with an expanding menu of interests in Central Asia that demand an enhanced presence. Officials and analysts in both capitals have voiced an interest in limiting or reducing the U.S. role both regionally and globally, advocating a “multipolar” strategy. For their part, U.S. officials have routinely expressed preferences for the region’s economic, political and military development that could only be served by a continued or even greatly enhanced role.

In short, the great powers’ interests in the region are competitive when viewed in their most expansive terms. Because officials and commentators give voice to these interests and periodically interpret their behavior in the region as an outgrowth of them, there is evidence for the great game narrative. But the game is only truly zero-sum to the degree that these clashing interests are priority rather than optional goals in each power’s hierarchy of regional strategic objectives. And the game is only “great” to the degree that these clashing regional interests figure importantly in each power’s global strategy. In contrast to the real Great Game between the Russian and British empires in the latter 19th century, neither condition is fulfilled consistently concerning the interests of today’s great powers.

For each of the main outside powers, the most pressing security interests in the region are not ones that can be achieved only at another major power’s expense. On the contrary, officials at the highest levels of all the governments concerned place the greatest emphasis on security interests that demand cooperation from the other powers.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding the defeat of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, transnational terrorism continues to be the major concern for all. Intricately linked to this issue is religious extremism and, especially, Islamist extremism, which the United States, Russia, and China see not only as a transnational threat from Afghanistan and Pakistan—especially vis-à-vis Kashmir—but also as a potential threat that might emanate from within the Central Asian states—especially Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Russia remains bogged down in an increasingly Islamicized war with Chechnya, which imposes hefty financial costs on the government and drains its military, while hampering reform and generating terror attacks in Moscow and other cities. China is particularly worried about Xinjiang’s Uighur separatist movement, which in recent years has taken on Islamic overtones and is reported to have backing from elements within its neighboring states. Russian and Chinese officials claim that the Chechen and Uighur movements belong to a transnational terrorist network with ties to the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and

are a principal security threat. The United States has endorsed the thrust of the Russian and Chinese portrayal of their links to wider terror networks.<sup>5</sup>

Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) linked to access to chemical, biological, and nuclear materials either in Central Asia or Russia, and made easier by poorly secured facilities and borders, is a second security priority for all concerned, but especially high on the U.S. agenda. For example, in January 2003, masked men raided a Kyrgyz chemical-mechanical plant and stole 460 kilograms of europium oxide power used in nuclear reactors. In remnants of the Soviet nuclear complex in the region, cesium devices are poorly accounted for. The Central Asian states have also been transit routes for WMD materials (e.g. low-enriched uranium, cesium 137, iridium-192 and plutonium), usually moving southward from Russia.<sup>6</sup> Narcotics trafficking—with Russia and the United States as target markets—is another important concern, which has increased dramatically with the Taliban’s defeat. Just as importantly, trafficking has been the major source of financing for various regional terrorist groups.<sup>7</sup> Even though the major powers continue to haggle over the best means for addressing this set of issues, it nonetheless creates background incentives for cooperation among them.

Although Central Asia’s strategic salience has been on the rise, the major powers’ strategic priorities lie elsewhere. For each of the three major outside players, bilateral relationships with the others are far more important than any stake they hold in Central Asia. As the chapters on China and Russia in this volume stress, the most pressing grand strategic objectives of China and Russia remain economic development and modernization. While both are animated by a quest for great power prestige, the current consensus among officials in both capitals is that for the foreseeable future prestige concerns must take a back seat to the drive for modernization whenever the two aims come into conflict. Moreover, for China, Russia, and the United States, more immediate strategic concerns put other regions above Central Asia in their hierarchy of interests. The U.S. war on terrorism has already shifted to the Persian Gulf. Russia’s most pressing security concerns remain in Chechnya and the Caucasus, while China remains focused on Taiwan. Developments in Central Asia are, of course, related to the powers’ most pressing immediate strategic concerns to a greater (Russia) or lesser (U.S., China) degree, but in no capital can zealous officials or policy advocates make the case that any outcome in the region is pivotal to the country’s core security.

This discussion leaves two important aspects of the “great game” narrative intact: the issue of counterbalancing U.S. hegemony, and the scramble for economic resources. There is no doubt the issue of counterbalancing

the United States plays a role in the rhetoric emanating from Moscow and Beijing. Both would prefer a multipolar world order. But there is scant evidence that they are willing or able to sacrifice other objectives to obtain it, and consequently the “Asian strategic triangle” has yet to cohere globally.<sup>8</sup> The “multipolar” preference, in practice, reflects both governments’ official policies favoring multilateral approaches to common security problems globally and regionally. In addition, anti-U.S. posturing is sometimes useful as a foil for fostering regional cooperation.

Describing the scramble for Central Asian resources and transportation routes as a new great game can be misleading for several reasons. Behind the Anglo-Russian great game was hardheaded thinking about how best to position one’s empire for a possible great-power war to the finish. Whatever value one might want to attach to the acquisition of ownership or control over the transportation of natural resources today, they can have minimal bearing on the outcome of a clash between nuclear-armed states. Moreover, there are compelling theoretical reasons, backed up by formidable empirical research, that control over natural resources is irrelevant—or even a hindrance—to the creation of a competitive economy.<sup>9</sup> Chinese, and now Russian, policymakers talk as if they recognize these findings, for they all insist that the road to “great powerdom” lies in the development of a modern competitive economy, not in serving as a resource supplier to others. Finally, governments’ ability to play geopolitics with the development of natural resources is far more constrained by market considerations than the more overheated great game rhetoric would suggest. Governments can have decisive influence on certain deals, but firms and markets determine how much they have to pay for that influence. And to assess how much various governments are willing to pay for influence in Central Asia, we must assess their actions even more closely than their words.

## Great Power Actions in Central Asia

Some analysts do not agree with this portrayal of the great powers’ interests in Central Asia; others contend that even if the powers’ objective interests in the region point toward cooperation, then mutual misperceptions, longing for empire or prestige, or “rogue” officials imperfectly controlled by their governments will generate rivalry nonetheless.<sup>10</sup> To assess these arguments, it is necessary to examine what the major powers are actually doing on the ground in Central Asia.

### The United States: From Nuclear Security to the War on Terror

After the Soviet collapse, U.S. policy focused on nuclear security—orchestrating the transfer of nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan to Russia and

securing the nuclear material remaining on Kazakh territory. Once that pressing issue was addressed, America's broader geo-strategic or security concerns in the region became less clear, and policy drifted towards a focus on energy interests and, consequently, the Caspian states. The lack of active U.S. involvement in negotiating the Tajik or Afghan civil wars in the early to mid 1990s, and the absence of a concrete U.S. response to the Taliban's sweep across Afghanistan revealed Washington's willingness to let Russia deal with instability in the non-energy states of Central Asia.

In the mid-1990s, intense U.S. efforts went into support for American energy interests in Kazakhstan's oil and gas sector. The United States had clear disagreements with Russia over preferred pipelines, which fueled innumerable reports about a new great game. Russia lobbied to expand existing lines going north through its own territory, giving it a near monopoly over oil exports. Although advocating "multiple pipelines" and a "win-win" policy, the United States strongly supported a western route from Azerbaijan through Georgia to Turkey. Tensions heightened, but the "great game" for the region's oil did not lead to conflict or cause a serious decline in U.S.-Russian relations. Ultimately, economic viability issues led to a compromise on two pipelines. In addition to expanding the Russian Novorossisk route, in late 2002 construction of the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) line began. BTC will become the major east-west energy transport route, but will not necessarily undercut exports north through Russia.

As the 1990s progressed, the United States began to take more action in support of its security goals in the region. The emphasis shifted toward bolstering stronger and more independent states in Central Asia and the Caucasus, which engendered a policy shift toward Uzbekistan and away from Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz government complained bitterly that the United States was giving more aid to its authoritarian neighbor and not seeing Kyrgyzstan through its political transition and economic crisis. Furthermore, U.S. assistance to Kyrgyzstan began to decline as the U.S. Congress became frustrated with backsliding in its democratization. Uzbekistan, meanwhile, became a key participant in the Partnership for Peace program and by 1999 a member of GUUAM, the U.S.-backed security arrangement in Central Asia and the Caucasus that excluded Russia.<sup>11</sup>

The rise of the Taliban, Al Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a militant and extremist "Islamic" organization, imparted new urgency to the challenge of terrorism between 1998 and 2001, though policy shifts in the region remained subtle. Countering terrorism, preventing Islamist extremism, enhancing border controls, and fighting narcotics trafficking increasingly became elements of U.S. policy and assistance programs—changes that affected the tenor and content of U.S.-Uzbek re-

lations. The United States signed several bilateral defense-related agreements on counter-terrorism and border controls with the Uzbek Ministry of Defense in May 1999. In mid-2000, the State Department put the IMU on its list of terrorist organizations. In June 2001 U.S. Secretary of State Powell and Foreign Minister Komilov of Uzbekistan signed the Cooperative Threat Reduction Agreement, which established a framework to prevent the proliferation of WMD and its technology and scientific expertise. The agreement—similar to the one signed with Kazakhstan in 1993—included a commitment to the dismantling of Soviet military, chemical, and biological weapons facilities remaining on Uzbek territory.

The September 11 attacks transformed U.S. policy into an all-consuming war on terror that drove Washington's greatly expanded involvement in Central Asia. The most striking and visible prong of the new approach was the stationing of U.S. military forces in the region. Shortly after September 11, the U.S. government initiated talks with all five Central Asian states to enlist their cooperation in the war on terror, and specifically in the mission in Afghanistan. The result was the establishment of a U.S. military presence with air bases in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, sending U.S. military advisors to Georgia, and the acquisition of over-flight and refueling rights in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan.

Uzbekistan was an obvious choice, owing both to its location and track record of military cooperation with the United States. On October 7, 2001, the United States and Uzbekistan signed an agreement following tough negotiations between the Department of Defense and CENTCOM with the Uzbek military and security services. The United States agreed to a “long-term commitment to advance security and regional stability” in Central Asia,<sup>12</sup> and the Uzbek government agreed to ongoing military cooperation with the United States, including allowing 1,500 U.S. troops engaged in the war in Afghanistan to continue to be based in southern Uzbekistan at the Khanabad-Karshi military facility. Although the official rhetoric claimed that the U.S. forces in Uzbekistan could only provide humanitarian assistance, other sources reported that the forces were engaged in military operations. In December 2001, after further difficult negotiations, President Karimov agreed to open the Friendship Bridge linking Uzbekistan and Afghanistan so that coalition forces and UN operations could bring aid and equipment into northern Afghanistan. In January 2002, the operations in Uzbekistan were declared to be part of a long-term, but not permanent, U.S. presence.

Shortly after making the basing agreement with the Uzbeks, the Americans decided to try for a second base in Central Asia. According to one U.S. official, the Uzbek government put up such resistance in the negotia-

tion process that the United States wanted to hedge its bets by using another country as well. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the most likely choices. Both presidents quickly offered basing rights, despite their countries' membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), thus indicating that Russia had not opposed the bases. The United States opted for the Ganchi base at Manas Airport in Kyrgyzstan, mainly due to its good condition. In December 2001, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev agreed to lease the base to the United States for the positioning of U.S. and coalition forces. These would include up to 3,000 U.S. troops. In sensitivity to both domestic opposition, especially from the more pro-Russian elements of the population and government, as well as Russia, the United States stressed that the base would host a coalition—not just U.S.—presence whose purpose was solely for assisting in humanitarian flights to Afghanistan. Hence, Korean, French, and other coalition forces and support staff were stationed together with the Americans. The Americans and Kyrgyz agreed to a one-year, renewable presence that would be extended as long as necessary to support anti-terror operations.

Meanwhile, the Dushanbe airport in Tajikistan became a temporary base for French Mirage jets, humanitarian missions, and a small number of U.S. troops supporting the war on terror. Tajikistan's border with northeastern Afghanistan became an important entry point for humanitarian aid to Badakhshan. A larger military deployment was not placed in Tajikistan, surprisingly, not out of concern for Russian opposition, but rather due to the poor quality of its bases and general security concerns.

In exchange for the use of the airbases—although not as a direct quid pro quo, according to U.S. government representatives—the U.S. government more than doubled its assistance to the region to \$723.51 million in 2002. The total budget in 2001 was \$313.47 million, and in 2000 it had been \$279.29 million.<sup>13</sup> The largest increases went to Uzbekistan, and then to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The bulk of assistance goes to security and law enforcement programs (32 percent), which include (non-lethal) military aid and training, enhanced border control, improved security services, and anti-terror and anti-narcotics trafficking programs. Support for economic reforms and humanitarian assistance takes second place. Despite continued rhetoric from State Department representatives about the necessity of reform, far less assistance goes to political or economic reform programs (16 and 9 percent, respectively, in 2002; 16 and 13 percent, respectively in 2001). Pressure on the Central Asian governments for democratization has not been linked to aid, and has met with very limited success.<sup>14</sup>

Despite its poor record of reform, Uzbekistan has emerged as the closest U.S. strategic ally in the region. Indeed, the evolving U.S.-Uzbek rela-

**Table 1. U.S. Assistance to Central Asia**

	U.S. assistance (FY2002 budgets - \$m and %)						
	Total	Kazak.	Kyrgyz.	Tajik.	Turk.	Uzbek.	Region
Democratization	92.4 (16%)	13.7 (16%)	22.7 (24%)	17.4 (11%)	5.6 (29%)	30.6 (14%)	2.5 (15%)
Market reform	55.3 (9%)	15.0 (17%)	18.0 (19%)	9.4 (6%)	0.9 (5%)	11.0 (5%)	1.0 (6%)
Security and law	187.2 (32%)	40.4 (47%)	37.5 (40%)	21.6 (14%)	7.8 (41%)	79.9 (37%)	...
Humanitarian aid	142.4 (24%)	0.7 (1%)	4.8 (5%)	87.2 (57%)	0.6 (3%)	48.6 (22%)	0.6 (4%)
Cross-sectoral	108.2 (18%)	16.9 (19%)	10.7 (15%)	18.0 (12%)	4.1 (22%)	46.5 (21%)	12.1 (75%)
Total (FSA/other) <sup>a</sup>	585.6	86.7	93.5	153.5	19.0	216.7	16.2
DoD assistance <sup>b</sup>	137.9	7.2	21.2	29.1	2.2	78.2	...
Total assistance	723.5	93.9	114.7	182.7	21.1	294.9	16.2

Source: Compiled from *Annual Report*, U.S. Department of State, 2002. Note: a) Total for U.S. aid from Freedom Support Act (FSA) funds and other government agency budgets; b) Total for Department of Defense excess and privately donated humanitarian commodities.

tionship has been the most dramatic element of the U.S. expanding influence in Central Asia. The agreement on Khanabad was followed by several others. In January, the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Uzbekistan, which was followed in March by a U.S.-Uzbek “Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework.” This five-point framework committed both sides to cooperation in political democratization, military-security cooperation, economic reform, humanitarian cooperation, and legal reform. The central element of this agreement, however, was really military-security cooperation. According to the U.S. State Department, “the two countries expect to develop cooperation in combating transnational threats to society, and to continue their dynamic military and military-technical cooperation.”<sup>15</sup> The framework specifically notes the need to develop non-proliferation and export controls, border infrastructure, security-military consultations, and to increase Uzbekistan’s participation in the Partnership for Peace (PfP). A regular consultative group of U.S. and Uzbek military and security officials was established. The framework may involve U.S. support for the technical modernization and better equipping of the Uzbek military. The agreement further expects the introduction of NATO standards into the armed forces, the training of peace-keeping units, bilateral and multilateral exercises with NATO through the PfP, and the establishment of a NATO PfP Training Center in Uzbekistan.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps most importantly, the agreement's language suggests enhanced U.S. support for Uzbekistan's security:

The United States affirms that it would regard with grave concern any external threat to the security and territorial integrity of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Were this to occur, the United States will consult with the Republic of Uzbekistan on an urgent basis to develop and implement an appropriate response in accordance with United States constitutional procedures. For its part, the Republic of Uzbekistan recognizes the critical importance of developing close, cooperative ties with its neighbors and promoting efforts at regional cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

The framework clearly aims to increase bilateral and multilateral strategic cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan for the chief purpose of increasing Uzbekistan's capacity to be a regional stabilizer and a counter to terrorism of all kinds.

Despite such increased activity in military and security sectors, the United States has not directly expanded its energy interests in the region. Contrary to the expectations of many great game pundits, the U.S. war on terror in Afghanistan has not been followed by U.S. support for oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian and Uzbekistan through Afghan territory to the south. The Asian Development Bank, with the backing of Pakistan, has provided money for a feasibility study,<sup>18</sup> but most U.S. and former Western advocates of this route remain skeptical. As of spring 2003, Unocal, the U.S. oil company avidly exploring the trans-Afghan line in the later 1990s, had not returned to press for this option. In this respect, the United States, Russia, and China are no more at odds about the extraction and transport of oil resources than before the U.S. expansion into Central Asia. The United States has promised increased loans to investors in Central Asia through the Ex-Im Bank in order to relieve the devastating regional economic crisis, but U.S. policy has not been directed at competing with Russian or Chinese economic interests in the region.

The longer-term U.S. position in Central Asia is still unclear. Although the war in Afghanistan ended far more quickly than many had anticipated, the U.S. military presence in the region remains. Except in Uzbekistan, that presence is still declared "short-term" and should depart when the clean-up operation inside Afghanistan winds down. It seems unlikely, however, that the Afghan situation will stabilize in the near future, or that the United States will depart from the region entirely. By most accounts, Afghanistan is dangerously unstable and Taliban supporters remain in hiding, occasionally attacking U.S. troops or assassinating President Hamid Karzai's allies.

Moreover, the threat of Al Qaeda's spread throughout Central Asia—to Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan—has increased as well. Last August, the United States announced a plan to spend \$5 million refurbishing the Khanabad base.<sup>19</sup> In spring 2003, the United States appeared to be expanding facilities at the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan as well.<sup>20</sup> According to one U.S. government official, commenting in January 2002, the positioning of U.S. forces in Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, was already being thought of in the Pentagon as part of a potential backup plan for military action in Iraq should the Gulf countries or Turkey deny the United States access to Iraq via bases in their countries.<sup>21</sup> Ultimately, however, the United States was able to use its long-standing presence in the Middle East to carry out the Iraqi war.

### Russia: Coping with New Security Challenges

As Central Asia's former imperial master with a vast web of influence, the greatest security stake, and a large contingent of officials and analysts who view the region through the geopolitical lens, Russia provides the most evidence for the great game narrative. Yet, imperial nostalgia and pugnacious rhetoric notwithstanding, Russia substantially reoriented its strategy in the latter 1990s. It began to take prudent steps to stabilize the region, especially since Putin's rise to power, which ushered in a new economically-driven pragmatism in Moscow's foreign policy.<sup>22</sup>

The question is whether the entry of U.S. military forces in the region has sparked a revision in Russia's basic strategy. One of the main pieces of evidence in support of the argument for a geopolitically resurgent and competitive Russian policy is Moscow's coordinated effort to place its regional military presence on a more secure long-term footing.<sup>23</sup> The problem with this argument is that this effort predated the U.S. entry into the region and was sparked by the threat of transnational terrorism—a security concern Russia shares with the United States, China, and the Central Asian governments themselves.

One example is Russia's policy of reinvigorating the multilateral but Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty (CST), under whose auspices much of Moscow's military activity in Central Asia takes place.<sup>24</sup> Despite its many declarations and its formal role as the legitimating instrument for Russian deployments in the region, by 1999 the CST was under-funded and poorly organized, had accomplished relatively little, and was dwindling into obscurity.<sup>25</sup> What sparked Moscow's effort to revamp the CST was not the United States, but the summer 1999 incursions of the IMU into the three Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The escalation of the war in Afghanistan and the Taliban's unexpected ability to seize and maintain power also rekindled Russian fears of Muslim extremism.<sup>26</sup>

The repeat of the IMU's invasion in the summer of 2000 instigated discussions of a joint CST rapid deployment force (CRDF). This force was officially formed in May 2001, but largely remained on paper, chronically short of real military units or capabilities.<sup>27</sup> In spring 2002, Russia and the Central Asian CST members began discussing the upgrading of the CST into a more effective Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the spring of 2002, Russia organized formation-level exercises (the "South Anti-terror 2002") with dedicated CRDF battalions from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia. In December, presidents Putin and Askar Akaev signed an agreement that writes-off or reschedules portions of Kyrgyzstan's state debt to Moscow in exchange for granting Russia the rights to the former Soviet flight-training airfield at Kant to provide air support for CRDF.<sup>28</sup> By early 2003, three SU-27 fighters, two SU-25 attack planes, and two IL-76 military cargo planes, together with 700 personnel, were reported to constitute the total Russian deployment, as work on the facility—considerably degraded, and rejected by the U.S. military in favor of the international airport at Manas—was still underway in April.<sup>29</sup>

The CSTO experience also highlights the modest nature of the real changes on the ground. In April 2003, member states agreed to strengthen CST institutions, translating the treaty into a full-fledged international organization with permanent governing bodies and a budget.<sup>30</sup> But little has yet been done to create the concrete manifestations of a lasting security institution (budgeting, staffing, headquarters, joint training and operations). Similarly, the CRDF is expected to be operational by 2004. At the same time, CSTO members admit that the organization's plans for such a force may well remain on paper, as in the past.<sup>31</sup> Others suggest that the base is merely a symbol of Russia's presence, but will have too little funding to provide an adequate defense against terrorism or IMU-like incursions.

Also part of Russia's effort to reinforce its regional military presence are negotiations with Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov for an expanded military profile in Tajikistan. Russian and Tajik officials negotiated an agreement to upgrade Russia's 201st Motorized Division from a "peace-keeping" unit within Dushanbe to a regular military force to be stationed at a full-fledged army base.<sup>32</sup> It is not clear if the numbers of Russian troops will increase, but a formal treaty on the base is expected. Although this would make the Russian presence more permanent, it should not be seen as a departure from previous Russian policy, which had kept the 201<sup>st</sup> in Tajikistan since 1991, and even long after the signing of the peace accord in 1997. Russia has used the base as a safeguard against both the rise of an Islamist government in Tajikistan and the infiltration of Islamist extremism from Afghanistan.

In addition to the effort to reinforce its military deployments in the region, Russia has also broadened military cooperation with Central Asian governments. Russia remains the chief arms supplier to the region (offering weapons, albeit in the small amounts the states can afford, at favorable terms), maintains important defense-industrial, air-defense, and space facilities in the region, and sustains close military-to-military and intelligence links with local armed forces.<sup>33</sup> Moscow recently signed deals with the Central Asian states that will allow Central Asian citizens to serve in the Russian army, after which they may apply for Russian citizenship. Rather than a ploy to weaken the Central Asian defense systems, this practice would potentially strengthen Central Asian militaries by giving their soldiers training and experience in a poor, but far better off military. If the soldiers return home, they will bring these skills with them.

At the same time, the policy may help resolve a social and demographic problem for Russia.<sup>34</sup> With negative growth in the Russian population—due to a declining birth rate and emigration, especially of youth—Russia's army and labor market in general will likely face severe shortages. Secondly, Russia's army has been plagued by desertions, low morale, and psychological trauma in the 1990s. Soldiers serving in the Chechen wars have left the military, often with shattered lives. Deaths are estimated at over 10,000. Those serving in other districts have left due to low pay and lack of the prestige and respect accorded to the former Soviet military. New recruits from Central Asia would in part address the shortage of Russian soldiers. For Central Asia's states, moreover, the agreement offers job opportunities to young men who would otherwise be unemployed and a potential source of unrest, protest, and crime. In contrast to Russia, population growth in Central Asia (other than Kazakhstan) continued to be high throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The local economies are generally still in decline and cannot absorb the labor surplus. According to Russia's foreign ministry, thousands of Central Asians, especially from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, already travel to Russia illegally as seasonal laborers and create border and visa problems as well as increased criminality and terrorist risks to Russia. The agreement on military service, like the basing agreements, was made on the basis of security interests primarily driven by fears of Islamist extremism and terrorism, not the threat of U.S. expansion.

Another element in Russia's security policy in the region is an effort to increase border controls, decrease narcotics-trafficking, and control the flow of WMD. Since 2001, Russia has accelerated its cooperation with China and the Central Asian members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (discussed in the next section). As part of the SCO, Russia has supported the development of the regional Anti-Terror Center, based in

Bishkek since 1999.<sup>35</sup> The center is intended to coordinate and share intelligence information among the member countries. In a recent critical step, Russia is working cooperatively with the United States and International Atomic Energy Agency to import spent fuel from the nuclear research reactor at Uzbekistan's Institute for Nuclear Physics.<sup>36</sup>

The final element in Russia's regional security policy also runs against the great game narrative. Given Russian weakness, the expense of securing the region, and Russia's official preference for multilateralism, Putin has stressed multilateral burden-sharing with outside powers, especially China and the United States. Putin himself, at the May 2002 meeting of the CSTO members, claimed that he approved of a cooperative relationship between the new CSTO and NATO in order to form a new global security system.<sup>37</sup> This is especially noteworthy, given that NATO is slated to take over peace-keeping in Afghanistan at the end of 2003. In addition, Russia has stressed the importance of cooperation with China in the SCO.

Russia's economic policies towards Central Asia, as elsewhere, have been increasingly defined by market forces. Despite long disagreement with the United States over the building of pipelines to the south, east, or west, Russia seems to have accepted that it cannot exclusively control oil extraction and export in the region.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, instead of opposing the U.S.-backed BTC line, major Russian oil and pipeline companies are now buying into the pipeline project. Russia's energy policy (especially in the oil sector) in the region is increasingly driven by profit motivations of private and semi-private Russian firms such as Lukoil.<sup>39</sup> A trans-Afghan line in the near to medium term is far less likely or contentious an issue than Iraq, which has not derailed the U.S.-Russian partnership. More broadly, Russia's strategy in Central Asia has exhibited less an attempt at hegemony than a concern for driving its economic growth through energy exports, investment and trade. Russia's recent deals in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have generally exchanged debt for assets in lucrative energy sectors.<sup>40</sup> Further, Central Asia continues to be a dumping ground for cheap Russian goods. Finally, in a departure from the early 1990s, Russia's latest iteration of the "Eurasian" common economic space was discussed in February 2003 at a summit in Novo-Ogaryovo. Invitations were based on states' potential economic contributions, not on older CIS notions of reconstituting the Russian empire; hence, Kazakhstan was included, whereas Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan were left out.<sup>41</sup>

### China: Responding to Economic and Security Concerns

Hu Jintao's inaugural trip abroad as China's president captured the essentials of Beijing's strategic behavior in Central Asia. At the St. Petersburg

summit, Hu and Putin signed an agreement on energy cooperation, and in Moscow's Kremlin they both met with their counterparts in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to initial documents further institutionalizing the grouping. Energy, trade, and multilateral efforts to address common security concerns dominate China's approach to the region.

In the security sphere, China's growing interests in Central Asia have primarily taken the form of bilateral or multilateral actions under the aegis of the SCO. Russian and Chinese leaders have frequently used SCO gatherings to express their preference for a multipolar world, and the grouping is often seen as a coordinating mechanism for counterbalancing U.S. power in the region.<sup>42</sup> Yet a close examination of the organization's real activities belies this interpretation.

In 1996, China initiated the founding of the "Shanghai Five," including China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Its main goal was confidence building among the new states, especially by resolving old Soviet-Chinese border disputes. China further sought to stabilize and secure the borders from Muslim extremism, a factor that threatened not only post-Soviet Central Asia but the restive Xinjiang region of western China. China feared that the Uighur separatists were getting funding, arms and support from Uighurs in its neighboring states, as well as from Afghanistan. Russia shared the common threat of an increasingly Islamicized Chechen separatist movement. Uzbekistan joined the group in 2001 as it sought a common forum for responding to the IMU's transnational guerilla threat.<sup>43</sup> The Shanghai six, now upgraded to the SCO, signed a declaration on June 15, 2001, expanding its mission in the region and focused increasingly on terrorist threats, religious extremism, and to a lesser extent, arms and narcotics trafficking. The organization announced the creation of a counter-terrorism center in Bishkek known as the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), but the project stalled and few assets were invested or resources committed.<sup>44</sup>

Hence, the one key issue that China, Russia and the Central Asians agreed upon that warranted an upgrading of the SCO was counter-terrorism. Having coordinated the grouping around this issue, however, the members were unable to assemble the capabilities required to address it. This shortcoming was made brutally evident after September 11, when U.S.-led *Operation Enduring Freedom* quickly toppled the Taliban and weakened the IMU—the very threats whose rise had just begun to provide the SCO's *raison d'être*. The U.S. deployment created a clear contradiction between the SCO's rhetorical role as a counterbalancing mechanism and its operational role as a regional security organization. China and Russia resolved the contradiction by bandwagoning with the U.S.-led war on ter-

ror. Indeed, on September 14, 2001, the SCO was the first international organization to issue a formal statement condemning the attacks on the United States. An extraordinary meeting of SCO foreign ministers in Beijing in January 2001 pledged the organization's support for the UN Security Council resolutions on Afghanistan and the international war on terror.<sup>45</sup>

In June 2002, SCO leaders announced the organization's charter in St. Petersburg, but they were unable to agree on a final document.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, China remained strongly committed to the organization. Under its auspices the first Chinese military exercises abroad were held with the Kyrgyz in October, with the purpose of training the Kyrgyz military in anti-terrorist activities.<sup>47</sup> At the third SCO summit in Moscow in May 2003, Hu Jintao, Putin, and the presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan signed documents authorizing the organization's budget, official emblem and flag, headquarters, and formal application to the UN for official registration as an inter-governmental organization in 2004. The Chinese were given the headquarters (in Beijing) and the secretary general (the current ambassador to Moscow). The leaders issued a statement confirming the SCO's commitment to the fight against terrorism. They reaffirmed their intention to develop RATS, announcing a joint anti-terror exercise involving the military forces of all member states, to be held in Kazakhstan in August.

Still, a great many practical issues remained unresolved, and the real contributions of the member states remain quite modest, as do the military, intelligence and police assets devoted to RATS. Details on the size of the SCO budget were not forthcoming after the May summit, and given the organization's track record there are grounds for skepticism about whether the member states will be able to commit the resources and decision authority necessary to make RATS an effective counter-terror force. The military and organizational capabilities of all the member states are at a much lower level than NATO norms, and both China and Russia face tight resource constraints. More important, virtually none of the organization's still modest activities could be seen as countering the United States. Indeed, at the May summit, SCO leaders stressed the organization's central concern with terrorism, religious extremism, separatism, and drug trafficking, and portrayed its mission as part of the U.S.-led war on terror.

Economically, China's actions in Central Asia have been relatively limited as well. Although it is often asserted that China is actively competing for Central Asia's resources, China has not been assertive in the Caspian, and is not clearly in competition with Russia or the United States. The Chinese government has long advocated the construction of a pipeline from the Caspian reserves across Kazakhstan and into western China. In fact, in

September 1997, then-Premier Li Peng signed an agreement with Kazakhstan to initiate this route. Neither Moscow nor Washington supports such a route, yet their vocal opposition may not be necessary, since conflict over the issue is unlikely to emerge for two reasons. First, the pure economics of the potential pipeline, estimated at over \$8 billion, may well preclude even an aggressive Chinese policy from winning such an energy export route from the Caspian. Second, despite its need for oil resources, most China analysts do not see China as pursuing territorial expansion in order to obtain them.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the Chinese have been actively engaged with Russia in negotiating alternative sources of energy from Russia's Siberian oil and gas deposits.<sup>49</sup> In April 2003, the China National Petroleum Company secured an initial agreement to build an oil pipeline from Russia's Angarsk Siberian fields to Daqing in China.<sup>50</sup> Three other gas and oil lines are under consideration. Eastern routes increase Russian-Chinese cooperation, while decreasing competition in the Caspian.

## The Central Asian States' Responses

The Central Asian states have responded to the great powers in varying ways. Most have increasingly hedged their bets between Russia and the United States, while remaining somewhat wary of China. In general, their actions in response to the great powers have been determined more by their need for economic support—whether through military bases or promised aid packages or trade deals—and their fear of regional terrorism, extremism and instability, than by their fear of great power hegemony.

### Uzbekistan's Response

The Uzbek response to initial U.S. requests for the use of bases and territory were met with some suspicion, as well as fear of a backlash from the Taliban, from its own Muslim extremist groups, and from Russia. U.S. and UN requests to open the Friendship Bridge became a further serious disagreement. The bridge had been long-closed because of the Taliban's grave security threats to the territorial integrity of Uzbekistan in 1997 and 1998. "The Uzbeks were therefore extremely resistant to the opening of the border. I've never seen such stolid and displeased faces when they made the agreement," said one western diplomat. "They doubted the U.S. commitment to protecting it from an attack. They claimed that it was a better guarded border than the North-South Korean border. In reality, however, a serious push by Taliban forces could have toppled it."<sup>51</sup>

Allowing U.S. forces on the Uzbek-Afghan border represented a significant break from past Uzbek policy, which had rejected Russian offers to station troops on the border to guard against Taliban movements into

Mazar-i-Sharif in 1998. The Uzbek government had also been upset by Russia's threats in 2000 to conduct air strikes against Taliban forces in northern Afghanistan. Uzbekistan had feared both a loss of sovereignty by allowing Russian forces on its territory and a backlash from the Taliban. Although the Russian ambassador to Uzbekistan claimed that Russia was not at all involved in the decision to base U.S. troops on Uzbek soil, and that neither the United States nor Uzbekistan had sought Russia's permission, Russia would not retaliate against Uzbekistan; in fact, trade and investment relations between Russia and Uzbekistan are increasingly strong.<sup>52</sup> Although the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov was reportedly strongly opposed to the bases, President Putin more importantly was not.

Despite his unease in opening Uzbek territory to outside powers, in a press statement after a meeting with Powell, Karimov indicated that the cooperation with the United States on Afghanistan was part of an increasingly broad relationship, stating: "If you think that we focused our attention mainly on the situation in Afghanistan, you will be mistaken....we have a conflux of questions of mutual interest."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, the subsequent MOU and Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework of 2002 reflected much of the expanded relationship with the United States that the Uzbeks had wanted. Although then Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sodyq Safaev forcefully denied that the basing agreement involved a 25-year lease,<sup>54</sup> the Uzbeks nonetheless consistently state that they want a long-term relationship, and that a short-term relationship or quick exit by the United States will increase Uzbekistan's insecurity and regional instability.<sup>55</sup> Most importantly for the Uzbeks, the Strategic Partnership gave Uzbekistan a "security guarantee." The agreement falls far short of a NATO-like guarantee, and is somewhat vague in the implications of the actual commitment demanded of the United States. Still, it strongly suggests that the United States will react to a threat to the territorial integrity of Uzbekistan—from Afghanistan, its Central Asian neighbors, or potentially even Russia. Furthermore, the agreement informally provides the United States some leverage to keep Uzbekistan's territorial ambitions, especially vis-à-vis Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in check—a prospect that bodes well for regional stability. By still holding out from giving Uzbekistan the more comprehensive "security guarantee" it still wants, the United States maintains its most important leverage for influencing this critical Central Asian state to promote the great powers' security interests, and the economic and political reforms that will enhance longer-term domestic and regional stability.

Uzbekistan clearly seeks to become a long-term U.S. strategic partner. In fact, while not openly admitting to the possibility of basing U.S. forces for an attack on Iraq, the Uzbek government was nonetheless the most

consistent and open supporter of the U.S.-led action among all the states in the Middle East and Central Asia. In its joint security cooperation consultations in April 2003, the United States continued to declare Uzbekistan its “strategic partner in Central Asia,” and reiterated the United States’ “willingness to expand its defense and military cooperation.”<sup>56</sup> Both sides concluded by stating that “their approaches to the issue of Iraq are in harmony. Uzbekistan supported the U.S. position on the disarmament of Iraq and the postwar reconstruction of that country for the greater stability, freedom, and prosperity of the entire region.”<sup>57</sup>

### Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's Responses

Compared to Uzbekistan, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have remained to a far larger extent within the sphere of traditional Russian hegemony. Prior to September 11, both were increasingly dependent on Russia economically and militarily. Yet, since September 11, both took the unexpected steps of rapidly offering overflight and then basing rights to the United States. In fact, they were actively competing with each other and Uzbekistan to secure a U.S. base for the military security and economic benefits it was expected to bring. The Kyrgyz in particular expected that a U.S. presence would help to internally stabilize their turbulent country, bring an influx of dollars to the failing economy, intimidate the IMU from undertaking renewed attacks, and further discourage Uzbekistan from making aggressive moves toward its neighbors. Indeed, as seen in Table 1 above, the U.S. assistance package to both has more than doubled in the wake of their agreements to actively participate in the U.S. anti-terror coalition.

In late 2002 and early 2003, both countries agreed to the expansion of the Russian and CSTO military presence on their territory as well (i.e. the CSTO and 201st Division bases discussed above). On the part of Kyrgyzstan, forgiveness of debt was a key factor in closing the deal with Russia. The Kyrgyz also sought a greater security guarantee than had been included in the U.S. MOU of 2002. Although some view their cooperation with China as a sign of their balancing against Russia and the United States, in reality, they are reacting to Chinese pressure to assist in cracking down on the Uighur separatists, whom China views as terrorists with Islamist connections. Kyrgyzstan’s joint military exercises with both Russia and China, and the basing agreements with Moscow and Washington, represent a patchwork of efforts to create a security regime for themselves, while not offending their powerful neighbors.

Russia’s deal with Tajikistan represents little shift in bilateral relations, since the 201st Division has been in the country for over a decade of independence, rarely serving as a peacekeeping force. Russia was critical in

bringing Rakhmonov to power, and Rakhmonov had wanted the 201st Division to remain after the peace deal, since its presence helped to stabilize his regime, which continued to be challenged by lingering armed opposition groups until 2001.<sup>58</sup> Yet, frustrated by lack of major Russian investment in his country, Rakhmonov skillfully used the war on terror to get greater aid from the United States and international financial institutions. With increased leverage, Rakhmonov then successfully sought Russian investment in a key hydroelectric power plant as something of a quid pro quo for the Russian base.<sup>59</sup> The Tajik president, like most of its neighbors, increasingly recognizes that the “Islamic threat” is internal as well, and thus that investment—whether fueled by Russia, the United States, or China—is key to growth, stability, and maintaining his power.<sup>60</sup>

Of the Central Asian states, only in Kyrgyzstan has a large domestic constituency been opposed to the U.S. presence.<sup>61</sup> The irony of this situation is that major elements of the lingering pro-democracy movement have been the leading spokesmen against military cooperation with the United States. They have viewed the U.S.-Kyrgyz deal in a negative light primarily because they believe it has fed government corruption. Despite U.S. State Department efforts to the contrary, the deal is widely perceived as the United States turning a blind eye to Kyrgyzstan’s increasingly autocratic regime and escalating human rights abuses in 2002.<sup>62</sup>

### Kazakhstan's Response

As the Central Asian state closest to Russia geographically, economically, and politically, Kazakhstan might have been expected to oppose an increased U.S. presence in the region. Certainly, a great game perspective would have anticipated either that the Kazakhs would support Russia in counterbalancing the U.S. presence in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, or that Moscow would put intense pressure on Astana to resist America’s blandishments. Instead, Kazakhstan, presumably with Russia’s nod of assent, used September 11 to intensify its ongoing military and economic cooperation with the United States. As noted earlier, the main U.S. (and Russian and Chinese) interest in Kazakhstan had been in the removal of its nuclear weapons facilities. Since then, Kazakhstan had cooperated with the United States militarily within the Partnership for Peace framework. At the same time, it was engaged with Russia in the CST, and with China and Russia in the SCO. Shortly after September 11, Kazakhstan offered the use of airspace, but given the greater strategic salience of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, Washington did not take advantage of the Kazakh offer.

While some skeptics took the absence of U.S. troops in Kazakhstan as a sign of souring relations, in April 2002 talks between Kazakh President

Nursultan Nazarbaev and U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld resulted in Kazakhstan offering three southern bases, including Almaty, for coalition use in “emergency situations.”<sup>63</sup> Probably observing that U.S. assistance to its more active allies in the war on terror had increased much more dramatically between 2001 and 2002 (the aid budget to Kazakhstan increased only from \$93.73 to 93.91 \$million<sup>64</sup>), Kazakhstan subsequently indicated that it might be willing to host a larger U.S.-led coalition military presence. At the same time, concern over relations with Russia has probably led Kazakhstan—like its neighbors—to continually state the U.S. presence must be short-term.

U.S. military assistance to Kazakhstan has recently increased. In February 2003, the U.S. delivered the first of a shipment of 39 high-mobility army vehicles to build the Kazakh military’s capacity to fight terrorism.<sup>65</sup> Even after tensions between Washington and Moscow had escalated over Iraq, the Kazakh parliament voted in May 2003 to send peacekeepers to Iraq to support the U.S. stabilization force.<sup>66</sup> Nor has China openly opposed U.S.-Kazakh cooperation. In June 2003, Hu Jintao announced the creation of a Chinese-Kazakh energy joint venture, and ongoing discussions for a Kazakh-China oil and gas pipeline.<sup>67</sup> Not unlike its Central Asian neighbors, Kazakhstan’s policy has been driven by a desire to maximize its security from terrorism and religious extremism, a desire to get on the U.S. gravy train, and pursuit of foreign investment and energy export markets.

### Turkmenistan’s Response

Turkmenistan’s behavior, driven by its inward-focused, megalomaniacal dictator Saparmurat Niyazov, differs from the more outward-looking hedging among great powers practiced by the other Central Asian states. At the same time, however, it ill fits the great game interpretation. Turkmenistan remained the sole Central Asian state to do little more than offer overflight rights to the United States after September 11. In fact, for most of the 1990s, Turkmenistan did not support CST, SCO, or U.S. initiatives on Afghanistan, since Niyazov did not perceive the Taliban to be a threat. Turkmenistan still does not participate in regional security arrangements. Yet, Turkmenistan’s “neutrality” has been driven far less by a fear of Russian retaliation than by the Turkmen president’s increasingly erratic behavior. Niyazov has advocated a trans-Afghan pipeline, but he has done little to court U.S. favor. Russia need not worry about U.S. support for the Turkmen initiative, since U.S. government officials and energy executives appear to be avoiding investment in an increasingly precarious “cult-of-personality,” which was recently the subject of a failed coup. Meanwhile, relations with Russia have worsened in ongoing disagreements over the Caspian Sea’s

division and Russian-Turkmen gas deals.<sup>68</sup> Both Moscow and Washington would prefer a change of regime; they may need to cooperate to promote a stable change, since no mechanism of succession currently exists.

In sum, the Central Asian states share significant common security interests with the great powers, and they almost uniformly (with the exception of Turkmenistan) recognize that they cannot address those security concerns without active cooperation with Russia, the United States, and increasingly China as well. The Central Asian states also welcome the economic benefits of increased great power activity in the region, and to a certain extent, they will continue to sell their cooperation to the highest bidders. Finally, a balanced U.S. and Russian military presence throughout the region need not lead to competition or division of the Central Asian states into American versus Russian spheres of influence. To the contrary, stable great power interests may decrease the likelihood of internecine actions among the Central Asian states themselves.

## Conclusion

The popular great game lens for analyzing Central Asia fails to capture the declared interests of the great powers as well as the best reading of their objective interests in security and economic growth. Perhaps more importantly, it fails to explain their actual behavior on the ground, as well the specific reactions of the Central Asian states themselves. Naturally, there are competitive elements in great power relations. Each country's policymaking community has slightly different preferences for tackling the challenges presented in the region, and the more influence they have the more able they are to shape events in concordance with those preferences. But these clashing preferences concern the means to serve ends that all the great powers share. To be sure, policy-makers in each capital would prefer that their own national firms or their own government's budget be the beneficiaries of any economic rents that emerge from the exploitation and transshipment of the region's natural resources. But the scale of these rents is marginal even for Russia's oil-fueled budget. And for taxable profits to be created, the projects must make sense economically—something that is determined more by markets and firms than governments.

Does it matter? The great game is an arresting metaphor that serves to draw people's attention to an oft-neglected region. The problem is that the great-game lens can distort realities on the ground, and therefore bias analysis and policy. For when great powers are locked in a competitive fight, the issues at hand matter less than their implication for the relative power of contending states. Power itself becomes the issue—one that tends to be non-negotiable. Viewing an essential positive-sum relationship through zero-

sum conceptual lenses will result in missed opportunities for cooperation that leaves all players—not least the people who live in the region—poorer and more insecure.

While cautious realism must remain the watchword concerning an impoverished and potentially unstable region comprised of fragile and authoritarian states, our analysis yields at least conditional and relative optimism. Given the confluence of their chief strategic interests, the major powers are in a better position to serve as a stabilizing force than analogies to the Great Game or the Cold War would suggest. It is important to stress that the region's response to the profoundly destabilizing shock of coordinated terror attacks was increased cooperation between local governments and China and Russia, and—multipolar rhetoric notwithstanding—between both of them and the United States. If this trend is nurtured and if the initial signals about potential SCO-CSTO-NATO cooperation are pursued, another destabilizing shock might generate more rather than less cooperation among the major powers.

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan are clearly on a trajectory that portends longer-term cooperation with each of the great powers. As military and economic security interests become more entwined, there are sound reasons to conclude that “great game” politics will not shape Central Asia's future in the same competitive and destabilizing way as they have controlled its past. To the contrary, mutual interests in Central Asia may reinforce the broader positive developments in the great powers' relations that have taken place since September 11, as well as reinforce regional and domestic stability in Central Asia.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Michael Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002; and Hooman Peimani, “Military buildup ends US-Russian honeymoon,” *Asia Times*, August 28, 2002.
- <sup>2</sup> We define Central Asia as the region consisting of the five Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. We distinguish this from the Caucasus region, although we discuss some overlapping security issues.
- <sup>3</sup> India, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, and other outside powers also figure in “great game” interpretations, and have undertaken initiatives in the region over the past several years, but their combined significance pales beside the “big three”—Russia, China and the United States—on which we focus.
- <sup>4</sup> See Thomas Christensen, “China,” William C. Wohlforth, “Russia,” in Richard J. Ellings and Aaron L. Friedberg with Michael Wills, eds., *Strategic Asia 2002–03: Asian Aftershocks*, Seattle: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2003.

- <sup>5</sup> The nature and extent of these links are disputed; the point here is the convergence of official positions. See “Interview with Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov,” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, January 14, 2003, translated in *CDI Russia Weekly*, no. 240, p. 2; “Text of White Paper on History, Development of Xinjiang,” *Xinhua*, May 26, 2003; and U.S. State Department, “Patterns of Global Terrorism,” 2002, <[www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pqtrp/2002](http://www.state.gov/s/ct/rls/pqtrp/2002)>.
- <sup>6</sup> Monterey Institute of International Studies, “Summary of Reported Nuclear, Radioisotope, and Dual-Use Materials Trafficking Incidents Involving the NIS,” <[www.nti.org/db/nistraff/tables/yrcharts/99chart](http://www.nti.org/db/nistraff/tables/yrcharts/99chart)>.
- <sup>7</sup> Yekaterina Stepanova, “Illicit drug trafficking in Afghanistan and Central Asia and its relation to the anti-terrorism campaign,” *Yadernyy Kontrol*, September 28, 2002; translated in FBIS-CNES-2002-1126.
- <sup>8</sup> In addition to the Russia and China Christensen chapters in last year’s *Strategic Asia* volume, see Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” in T. V. Paul and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Balance of Power Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, forthcoming; and Alastair Iain Johnston, “Is China a Status Quo Power?” *International Security*, vol. 27, no. 3 (Spring 2003), pp. 5–56.
- <sup>9</sup> On the economics, see J. D. Sachs and A. Warner, “The Curse of Natural Resources,” *European Economic Review*, vol. 24 (2001), pp. 827–38; and on the politics, Adam Przeworski, et. al., *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- <sup>10</sup> See, for example, Stephen M. Blank, “Central Asia’s Strategic Revolution,” *NBR Analysis* (forthcoming 2003); Charles Maier, “America Discovers Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 82, no.2 (March/April 2003), pp. 120–32; and Andrew Bacevich, “Bases of Debate: America in Central Asia: Steppes to Empire,” *The National Interest*, Summer 2002.
- <sup>11</sup> GUUAM members include Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. For an extensive discussion of this period, see Roy Allison, “Structures and Frameworks for Security Policy Cooperation in Central Asia,” in Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, eds., *Central Asian Security*, Washington, DC: Brookings Press, 2001, 219–40.
- <sup>12</sup> Department of State Press Release, Joint Press Conference with President Islam Karimov, December 8, 2001, <[www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/dec/6749.htm](http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2001/dec/6749.htm)>.
- <sup>13</sup> Figures are from the Department of State, updated as of February 24, 2003.
- <sup>14</sup> Kathleen Collins, “U.S. Policy and Political and Economic Reform in Central Asia,” manuscript presented to Stanford University, November 15, 2002.
- <sup>15</sup> “United States-Uzbekistan Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework,” State Department Fact Sheet, March 12, 2002, <[www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/8736](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/8736)>.
- <sup>16</sup> “Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework Between the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan,” released July 8, 2002, <[www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/2002/11711](http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/2002/11711)>.
- <sup>17</sup> “Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework...”
- <sup>18</sup> Eurasianet.org, 2002.

- <sup>19</sup> "U.S. military to finance renovation of Uzbek air base," Eurasianet.org, August 5, 2002.
- <sup>20</sup> *Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2003, p. 1.
- <sup>21</sup> Interview with a U.S. government official, Tashkent, January 2002.
- <sup>22</sup> From 1996 to 1997, Russia changed course and became actively involved in negotiating a peace accord in Tajikistan. See Kathleen Collins, "Tajikistan: Bad Peace Agreements and Prolonged Civil Conflict," in Chandra Sriram and Karin Wermerster, eds., *From Promise to Practice: Strengthening UN Capacities to Resolve Civil Conflict*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2003. On the changes under Putin, see the Russia chapter in last year's *Strategic Asia* volume.
- <sup>23</sup> See for example, Stephen Blank, "Scramble for Central Asian bases," *Asia Times*, April 8, 2003.
- <sup>24</sup> Signed in 1992 in Tashkent, the CST includes Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan withdrew in 1999. Although under pressure by Russia at the time to return, Uzbekistan determined to stay out of the organization.
- <sup>25</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Future of Transcaspian Security," Carlisle, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, August 2002.
- <sup>26</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "Central Asia's Stability and Russia's Security," *PONARS Memo*, no. 168, November 2000.
- <sup>27</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance: 2002–2003*, London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2003.
- <sup>28</sup> IISS, *The Military Balance: 2002–2003*.
- <sup>29</sup> The base is expected to open formally in July 2003 (Interfax). William D O'Malley and Roger N. McDermott, "The Russian Air Force in Kyrgyzstan: the military implications," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, April 23, 2003.
- <sup>30</sup> Radio Free Europe, April 28, 2003; Eurasianet.org, April 29, 2003.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibragim Alibekov and Sergei Blagov, "New Russian security organization could help expand Russia's influence in Central Asia," April 29, 2003, Eurasianet.org.
- <sup>32</sup> Vladimir Mukhin, "Rossiya sozdaet krupnyu voennuyu bazu v tsentral'noi azii (Russia establishes a major military base in Central Asia)," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 21, 2003.
- <sup>33</sup> Arms sales generalization is based on a review of IISS, *The Military Balance*; SIPRI arms transfers database, <www.sipri.org>; and the UN conventional arms register, <disarmament.un.org/un\_register.nsf>. A partial exception to the statement about military-to-military ties is Turkmenistan; see Anton Aleekseev, "Vooruzhenye sily Turkmenistana (Turkmenistan's military forces)," *Ekspert vooruzhenii*, at Tsentralnaya analiza strategii i tekhnologii, <www.cast.ru/russian/publish/2002/may-june/alexeev.html>. Russian press reports stress that close defense cooperation includes Uzbekistan, despite its non-membership in the CSTO. See Fedor Sukhov, "Islam Karimov meniaet svoiu orientatsiiu (Islam Karimov changes his orientation)," *Obshchaia gazeta*, February 5, 2001, p. 2.
- <sup>34</sup> Nicholas Eberstadt, "The Future of AIDS," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 6 (November/December 2002).
- <sup>35</sup> O'Malley and McDermott, "The Russian Air Force in Kyrgyzstan: the military implications." The Bishkek Center has yet to be formally opened, though it is routinely referred to as operational.

- <sup>36</sup> Radio Free Europe, April 29, 2003; and Sergei Blagov, “All it takes is thugs with clubs,” *Asia Times*, January 15, 2003.
- <sup>37</sup> Stephen Blank, “Central Asia’s Strategic Revolution,” p. 125. Blank also notes “talk of having America subsidize the SCO,” p. 113.
- <sup>38</sup> Adam Stulberg, “Leveraging Preponderance: Russia’s Agenda Control and Caspian Pipeline Politics,” manuscript presented to the University of Michigan, November 9, 2002.
- <sup>39</sup> Catherine Belton, “Putin’s delicate balancing game,” *Moscow Times*, March 13, 2003, and Stulberg (2002).
- <sup>40</sup> See Martha Olcott, “Central Asia,” *Strategic Asia 2002–03*, p. 242.
- <sup>41</sup> Igor Torbakov, “Russian economic integration effort may leave most of Central Asia behind,” Eurasianet.org, March 11, 2003.
- <sup>42</sup> See, for example, Sergei Blagov, “Russia seeking to strengthen regional organizations to counterbalance Western influence,” *Eurasia Insight*, December 4, 2002, Eurasianet.org.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with senior analyst, Institute of Strategic Studies, Uzbekistan, Tashkent, August 2002.
- <sup>44</sup> “Declaration of the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15, 2001,” <[www.missions.itu.int/~kazaks/eng/sco/sco02](http://www.missions.itu.int/~kazaks/eng/sco/sco02)>.
- <sup>45</sup> “Joint Statement by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” January 7, 2002, Beijing, <[www.missions.itu.int/~kazaks/eng/sco/sco06](http://www.missions.itu.int/~kazaks/eng/sco/sco06)>.
- <sup>46</sup> Reports suggested that the delay was partly the result of Russia seeking more binding commitments than the Central Asian members were willing to accept. See Matthew Oresman, “The SCO: A New Hope or to the Graveyard of Acronyms?” *PacNet Newsletter*, no. 21, May 22, 2003, <[www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0321.htm](http://www.csis.org/pacfor/pac0321.htm)>.
- <sup>47</sup> BBC Monitoring, October 10, 2002.
- <sup>48</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Limited Partnership: Russia-China Relations in a Changing Asia*, Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1998.
- <sup>49</sup> Charles Ziegler, “Russia, China, and Energy in Central and East Asia,” manuscript presented at Caspian Security Conference, Seattle, April 29, 2003.
- <sup>50</sup> *Economist*, May 24, 2003. See also the analyses in the Northeast Asia and Russia chapters in the volume.
- <sup>51</sup> Interview with a UN official, Tashkent, January 8, 2003.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with a high-level Russian official in Uzbekistan, Tashkent, January 2002.
- <sup>53</sup> State Department Press Release, Joint Press Conference with President Islam Karimov, December 8, 2001.
- <sup>54</sup> Press Conference with Sodyq Safaev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, January 23, 2002.
- <sup>55</sup> Interview with a senior advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, August 2002.
- <sup>56</sup> United States-Uzbekistan Joint Security Cooperation Consultations, Press Statement, April 15, 2003 <[www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/19665](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2003/19665)>.
- <sup>57</sup> United States-Uzbekistan Joint Security Cooperation Consultations, Press Statement.

- <sup>58</sup> Interview with a Tajik journalist, Dushanbe, August 2002.
- <sup>59</sup> Radio Free Europe, April, 2003.
- <sup>60</sup> Viktoriya Panfilova, “Dlya Tsentral’noi azii ne tak strashen Ben Laden, kak defitsit chistoi vody (For Central Asia, Bin Laden is less frightening than the shortage of clean water),” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, May 20, 2003.
- <sup>61</sup> Elizabeth Wishnick, “Growing US Security Interests in Central Asia,” Carlisle, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, October 2002. Kazakh polling data also shows significant opposition to a long-term presence, though none is there yet.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Toilekan Ismailova, leader of Coalition of NGOs in Krygyzstan, February 2003.
- <sup>63</sup> ITAR-TASS, in *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, April 28, 2002.
- <sup>64</sup> Annual Reports, U.S. Department of State, 2000–02.
- <sup>65</sup> “United States begins delivery of high mobility army vehicles to Kazakhstan,” Associated Press, in *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, January 20, 2003.
- <sup>66</sup> Interfax-Kazakhstan, in *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, May 30, 2003.
- <sup>67</sup> Ted Weihman, “China making diplomatic push in Central Asia,” Eurasianet.org, June 9, 2003.
- <sup>68</sup> Stephen Blank, “The Russia-Turkmenistan Gas Deal Gone Awry,” *Central Asia–Caucasus Analyst*, July 2, 2003.