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**U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA
AND THE CHALLENGES TO THEM**

Stephen J. Blank

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FOREWORD

For the United States, Central Asia is a region of both growing importance and of growing challenge. Its proximity to Russia, China, Iran, India, and Pakistan; location as the center of the Global War on Terrorism; and its large energy holdings make it a strategic region where the United States has important, some might even say vital, interests. Those interests pertain, first of all, to geostrategic realities of security, particularly in the war on terrorism. But they also pertain to energy and to the effort to support liberalizing and democratizing reforms.

However, today those interests are challenged by Russo-Chinese and Iranian opposition to U.S. presence there, those governments' and local regimes' resistance to reform, and the revival of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Therefore we need to assess how those challenges are manifesting themselves and how America best might adapt to meet them and pursue its interests with greater success.

Accordingly, the Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to present this monograph by Professor Stephen Blank who takes a fresh look at the current situation in Central Asia and makes substantive policy recommendations to the U.S. Army, the Defense Department, and the U.S. Government concerning the best way to move forward in this critical area of world politics.


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

SUMMARY

Central Asia is an area whose importance to the United States is growing. Yet it also is an imperiled region because it faces numerous constant challenges stemming from pervasive internal misrule and the continuing interest of terrorist organizations in overthrowing local regimes. Its significance is, first, strategic due to its proximity to the war on terrorism and major actors like Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and India. Only secondarily is it important by virtue of its energy. Another key interest of U.S. policy is the promotion of democratic reforms and of open societies throughout the region.

Today American interests are under challenge in three definable areas. First, Russia and China have launched a coordinated campaign to oust the U.S. strategic presence from Central Asia. Second, they and local governments, who have good reason to fear democratic reforms, have waged an ideological campaign, accusing the United States of organizing “color revolutions” to oust those regimes from power. The purpose here is to preserve the status quo and, for Moscow and Beijing, to further erode America’s capability for action in the area. The third challenge is that posed by a revived Taliban offensive in Afghanistan. Thus America faces simultaneous and overlapping military, political, economic (attempts to close markets, in particular energy markets), and ideological challenges to its interests.

These challenges succeeded to a point in 2005 because of a lack of policy coordination at home and due to diminishing policy interest in the region, e.g., a neglect of the need to answer ideological attacks on

U.S. policy. Consequently, any successful U.S. strategy must be holistic, i.e., embracing and utilizing all the instruments of power—diplomacy, information, military, and economic. It must, first, be coordinated rigorously at home within the framework of clear policy guidance as to just how important this region is for America. The recommendations for policymakers that are contained here also emphasize the need to work with allies both within the area and outside it, e.g., India, the European Union, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. This means working with all the regional governments to the extent that it is possible, no matter how unsavory their conduct is or has been. Only on the basis of this internal reorganization of our own policy process that employs all policymaking agencies in a coordinated fashion, as well as by ongoing and simultaneous close monitoring of the possibility of failed states here, and cooperation with allies will it be possible for the United States to retrieve the situation and reinvigorate its capacity for securing important national security interests pertinent to Central Asia.

U.S. INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CHALLENGES TO THEM

Introduction.

Central Asia is an area whose importance to the United States is acknowledged to be growing. In 2004 Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told Central Asians that “stability in the area is of paramount importance and vital national interest.”¹ Yet today American interests are under attack from three sides in Central Asia: Russia and China, the Taliban and their supporters, and the authoritarian misrule of Central Asian governments. Worse yet, it is not implausible that some local governments might fail. As Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte reported to Congress,

Central Asia remains plagued by political stagnation and repression, rampant corruption, widespread poverty, and widening socio-economic inequalities, and other problems that nurture radical sentiment and terrorism. In the worst, but not implausible, case central authority in one or more of these states could evaporate as rival clans or regions vie for power – opening the door to an expansion of terrorist and criminal activity on the model of failed states like Somalia and, when it was under Taliban rule, Afghanistan.²

While some of these attacks are or would have been unavoidable, others are due to shortcomings in U.S. policy which gave these adversaries opportunities to exploit those defects in U.S. policy to their own advantage. This monograph addresses these deficiencies and includes recommendations for extricating America from the present unhappy situation confronting it there.

U.S. Interests in Central Asia.

U.S. interests in Central Asia primarily are strategic. They derive first from the proximity of this area to Russia, Iran, and China.³ Indeed,

The United States and the West in general find themselves increasingly dependent on the continued stability and development of the Central Eurasian region. The United States is heavily invested in Afghanistan, and its engagement there and in Central Asian states is a long-term endeavor. The future of this region has a considerable bearing on the development of the Global War on Terrorism and in general on U.S. security interests in Eurasia; the maintenance of access to airspace and territory in the heart of Asia; the development of alternative sources of energy; and the furthering of freedom and democratic development.⁴

Hence Russia and China view any U.S. presence in Central Asia as a standing challenge, if not a threat, to their vital interests which inherently are imperial in nature and entail a diminution of the effective sovereignty of Central Asian states. Therefore, it is not surprising that the paramount U.S. objective under both the Clinton and Bush administrations has been to uphold the integrity, independence, sovereignty, and security of these countries against Russian and Chinese efforts to dominate them and circumscribe their freedom.⁵ As stated in June 2004 by Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, Lorne Craner,

The primary strategic goal of the United States in Central Asia is to see the development of independent, democratic, and stable states, committed to the kind of political and economic reform that is essential to modern societies and on the path to integration and to the world economy. The strategy that we follow is based on

simultaneous pursuit of three related goals. The first of these goals is security. Our counterterrorism cooperation bolsters the sovereignty and independence of these states and provides them with the stability needed to undertake the reforms that are in their long-term interest. However, in order for these nations to be truly stable over the long-term and to be fully integrated into the international community, to achieve their potential, they must allow for greater transparency, respect for human rights, and movement toward democratic policy. Finally, the development of Central Asia's economic potential, including its extensive natural resources, requires free market economy reforms and foreign direct investment. This is the only way to improve the well-being of the region's people, diversify world energy sources, and facilitate the movement of these countries into the world economy.⁶

In other words, energy access, though important, is not and should not be the primary driver of U.S. policy here. Rather, it is a means to an end. Opening up Central Asian states' access to markets and energy companies' reciprocal access to them enables Central Asian governments to diversify their customer base and gain access to global markets where they can sell their products at global market prices. In this sense, the driving force behind U.S. policy is anti-monopoly, while the driving force behind Moscow and Beijing's policies is quintessentially monopolistic in nature.⁷ This American policy of defending the independence, integrity, and security of these states extends the long-established vital geostrategic interest of the United States in forestalling the rise of any Eurasian empire in either continent that could challenge it. And there should be little doubt that imperial success in Central Asia would only encourage the rulers in Moscow and Beijing to extend further their hegemonic aspirations. Certainly they have long known that a great power

rivalry or competition for influence in Central Asia is rising and regard any alternative method of building organized structures of relationships there as a threat to their vital interests.⁸

Since September 11, 2001 (9/11), a second vital interest for the United States has appeared, namely defense of the United States and of Europe from Islamic terrorism personified by Osama Bin Laden and carried out by the Taliban and their allies. Consequently, victory in Afghanistan, i.e., the conclusive routing of the Taliban and the establishment of a secure, viable, and legitimate Afghan state, is a vital interest which must be achieved just as much as, if not more, than in Iraq. The other important interests of the United States apply, first, to what might be called an open door or equal access for U.S. firms in regard to energy exploration, refining, and marketing. To the extent that sales of Central Asia's states' large energy holdings are restricted to Russia due to the dearth of pipelines or oil and gas, they will not be able to exercise effective economic or foreign policy independence. Therefore energy access on equal terms to American and other Western firms relates very strongly to the larger objective of safeguarding these states' independence, sovereignty, and prospects for secure development.

Not surprisingly, the leitmotif of U.S. energy policy has been to foster the development of multiple pipelines and multiple links to outside consumers and providers of energy, including, more recently, electricity, with regard to India.⁹ The Central Asian energy-producing states recognize that their security and prosperity lie in diversification of pipelines so U.S. and Central Asian interests are in harmony in this area. Washington has sought to prevent a Russian pipeline or overall energy monopoly from forming in the oil market with

considerable success, while it has had much less success with regard to natural gas. Simultaneously, America has sought to isolate Iran from Central Asian energy by urging states to build pipelines that bypass Iran and enforcing sanctions upon those states and firms who are trading with Iran.

Examples of pipelines bypassing Iran and Russia are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline where the United States long has urged Kazakhstan to join it and to participate in the construction of a pipeline under the Caspian Sea; a projected Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) line, which may or may not be extended to India, or alternatively a potential pipeline using newly discovered sizable Afghan energy resources to the Subcontinent; and the recent attempt to link Central Asian and South Asian electricity networks.¹⁰ Indeed, U.S. and Western firms have been relatively successful in gaining access to Kazakhstan's oil fields in terms of contracts for exploration or refinery, and marketing.¹¹ Finally, Washington has a major interest in promoting domestic policies in all these states—the five former Soviet republics and Afghanistan—that will lead them over time toward democratization, open markets, open societies, good governance, and, eventually as a result, to their lasting security against both internal and external challengers.

Military-Political Challenges to U.S. Interests: Russia and China.

Today all these interests are under attack, and the U.S. policy in Central Asia is embattled and under siege. Moscow and Beijing, as well as to a lesser degree Tehran, view America's political and strategic presence in Central Asia with unfeigned alarm. Indeed, Russia

and China suspect America's desire for bases there.¹² Despite Russo-Chinese protestations of support for the U.S. war on terrorism, in fact they wish to exclude America from the area and fear that it means to stay there militarily, and in other ways, indefinitely. In this campaign, Moscow has taken the lead, with Chinese and Iranian support. Russia has sought with great consistency and success to establish a gas cartel under its leadership. Russian President Vladimir Putin started calling for this in 2002 and has moved steadily since then to achieve this goal, under the guise of an energy club, which he reiterated at the most recent summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹³ Russia may actually be in sight of this goal. As the U.S. forecasting firm, *stratfor.biz*, reported in late 2005,

All natural gas produced in the former Soviet Union comes from Gazprom, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, or Turkmenistan with any natural gas originating in a country ending in "stan" having to transit through Kazakhstan and Russia on its way to any market. The KazMunaiGaz deal means that Gazprom—and by extension the Kremlin—now owns *all* of that gas. Any state wishing to use Central Asian gas in order to get energy independence from Russia is now out of luck. [Obviously this also includes the Central Asian states themselves-author.] This is particularly worrisome for states such as Ukraine and the Baltic states who now have no reasonable alternative to Russian-owned natural gas. Russia has been bandying the threat of sharply higher energy prices around for years. Now it has finally taken the concrete step necessary to make that an arbitrary reality.¹⁴

Thus the degree to which Central Asian energy markets are open or closed is an issue of great and increasing importance to European states' energy security and explains why European interest in Central Asia, even if

it still is relatively small, is growing.¹⁵ This fact heightens the already important and obvious consequences of any such cartel. A Russian-led cartel, and worse yet the possibility of a joint Irano-Russian cartel which may be implicit in Putin's latest proposal to the SCO and in Iranian soundings about a gas and oil arc with Russia, would prevent Central Asian states from selling natural gas on the open market through diversified pipelines and to the customers of their choice, thus perpetuating their backwardness, dependence upon Russia, and slowing their economic growth.¹⁶ Such a cartel also would facilitate Russia's ability to put the squeeze on European customers for concrete economic, political, and strategic gains at the expense of Western interests like the factual independence of Ukraine, the Baltic states, Georgia, and Central Asian governments. Accordingly, Russia also has brought considerable pressure to bear upon Kazakhstan, if not Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, to desist from supporting the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline or the idea of constructing a pipeline under the Caspian Sea.¹⁷ Either Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan, if not both, might be forced to become Russia's "partners" in natural gas.¹⁸ Such policies also lead, in both Russia and the local regimes, to the consolidation of authoritarian governments that rely on resource rents to keep themselves in power, i.e., they are petro-states. Indeed, arguably the Putin regime could not survive in its present structure if it did not dominate Central Asian gas and oil sectors.¹⁹ Therefore American success in opening up those sectors has knock-on effects in Russia beyond the more directly observable consequences of such liberalization in Central Asia.

Russia also has waged a stubborn campaign to prevent Central Asian states from affiliating either

with the U.S. or Western militaries. It seeks to gain exclusive control of the entire Caspian Sea and be the sole or supreme military power there, while states like Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan rely upon Western, and especially U.S., assistance to help them develop forces to protect their coastlines, exploration rigs, and territories from terrorism, proliferation operations, and contraband of all sorts.²⁰

In addition, Russia has formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to prevent local states from aligning with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or getting too involved with its Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. As part of this drive, Moscow now demands a veto power over other Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) members' defense ties to the West. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov stated that,

The countries of the region are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). And [if the countries of the region are] making a decision about hosting new bases on their territory, they should take into account the interests of Russia and coordinate this decision with our country.²¹

Even in 2003, Ivanov claimed the right to intervene in these countries and more recently highlighted Russia's anxiety about any potential political change in these states' internal constitutions. Undoubtedly, military replies to such challenges are being considered.²² Similarly, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov threatened supposedly "disloyal" governments in the CIS with the use of "every conceivable economic pressure tactic."²³

Another purpose of the CSTO is to create legal-political grounds for permanently stationing Russian forces and bases in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and possibly

Uzbekistan, ostensibly to defend these regimes against terrorism.²⁴ Nikolai Bordyuzha, the CSTO's Secretary General, also has called on its members to coordinate efforts to counter religious extremism, i.e., give it a license to meddle in their domestic affairs. And the CSTO, under Russian leadership, constantly is seeking to augment the scope of its missions in Central Asia, moving from air defense to counterterrorism, and now discussing peace support operations in order to cement a Russian-dominated security equation there.²⁵

Observers understand that these policy imperatives are part of a larger pattern of activities that points to intensified Russian efforts to create more effective trade and defense organizations in the CIS under its auspices and consolidate its hegemonic position there. Russia's activities in regard to the Caspian Sea play an important role in this project but have received scant attention in the West. Since April 2005, Russia repeatedly has advocated an international naval task force or operations group in the Caspian called CASFOR.²⁶ Putin set up this task force or rapid reaction force allegedly to defend against terrorism, arms trafficking, drug running, and proliferation of WMD components, and supposedly modeled it after the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization's BLACKSEAFOR (Black Sea Force).

Even so, CASFOR is to be planned as a conventional naval force that does not appear to be appropriate to the missions Moscow proposes. This has led observers to suspect that Russia intends to subsume the fledgling naval forces of Central Asian states, set up to guard their coastal installations within a Russian command structure, and prevent them from obtaining Western support for developing their own defense capabilities. Moscow also hopes thereby to consolidate its

dominant position in the Caspian and in the continuing discussions on the ultimate disposition of its waters by agreement among the littoral states, making the proposed CASFOR an intended instrument of Russian hegemony in Central Asia. Also, Russia wants to enhance its CIS organization, the CSTO, so that the SCO, which it regards as largely a Chinese initiative, does not have the sole prerogative of helping Central Asian states to defend themselves.

Finally there are signs that Russian figures are entertaining thoughts of a preemptive intervention if they believe that it is needed to rescue potentially failing states like Kyrgyzstan from collapse. According to a recent assessment by Ilyas Sarsembaev,

Some Russian military analysts consider that if Kyrgyzstan were overtaken by a complete political collapse, Russia and Kazakhstan could impose some kind of protectorate until stability could be reestablished and new elections held. In this scenario, the United States would allow Moscow to take action in Kyrgyzstan, because most of its own resources would already be mobilized in Iraq and Afghanistan—and probably in Iran and Syria. Russian help would then be welcomed and much preferred to that of China. Indeed, if Russia did not dare to put itself forward as a stabilizing force, China might use Uyghur separatism.²⁷

No matter how fanciful this scenario might sound, it illustrates both Russia's determination and growing capabilities in Central Asia and the way in which domestic pathologies there could interact to create an international crisis and conflict.

Sarsembaev's example also confirms that, in reality, these Russian forces in Central Asia are there to defend Russian interests and/or keep the current authoritarian regimes in power. Despite Russia's relative military

weakness and unbroken military decline in 1991-2000, it now has bases in 12 of the former Soviet republics, and the expansion of its capability to project power into these areas, if not beyond, by expanding existing bases or building new ones is one of the leading drivers of current Russian military policy.²⁸ Similarly, another motive force of Russian military policy is the effort to develop, sustain, and project the land, sea (Caspian), and air capabilities needed to prevent local governments from either receiving U.S. weapons and assistance or allowing U.S. military bases in their territories. For example, this objective is one of the driving forces behind Russia's proposals for CASFOR.²⁹ The practical outcome of so exclusive a force made up only of littoral states would be to confirm the littoral states as dependencies of Russia, put Iran in a subordinate position in the Caspian, and exclude foreign military or energy presence there.³⁰

Simultaneously, Moscow and Beijing also have waged an unrelenting campaign since 2002 to impose limits on the duration and scope of America's presence on Central Asian bases and more generally in the region.³¹ They succeeded in Uzbekistan, thanks to Washington's misconceived policies there. For example, Washington failed to counter effectively Russo-Chinese propaganda, at both the presidential and public levels, that the United States was behind the revolutions of 2003-04 in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and also behind the Andizhan uprising of 2005.³² Moscow and Beijing also constantly are bringing enormous pressure on Kyrgyzstan to force the United States out of the base at Manas and submit to being part of a Russian and Chinese sphere.³³ Under domestic and foreign pressure, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev of Kyrgyzstan demanded a 100-fold increase in the

earlier rent for Manas of \$2 million annually. Probably only the combination of deep U.S. pockets, high-level intervention by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and renewed fighting in Afghanistan has allowed America to stay at Manas by providing \$150 million in assistance to Kyrgyzstan.³⁴ The recent upsurge of fighting in Afghanistan ironically worked to U.S. advantage here, since Bakiyev openly and formally had tied the extension of the base to the level of fighting in Afghanistan.³⁵

Although former Secretary Rumsfeld also apparently sought to obtain increased access in Tajikistan, he was rebuffed by that government, which is no less mindful of its dependence upon Russia and its vulnerability to Russian pressure.³⁶ Russia also has sought to forestall these states from buying Western equipment by selling them Russian weapons at subsidized prices. And in return for their debts, it has sought to restore the Soviet defense industrial complex by buying equity in strategic defense firms located there.³⁷ Russia and China also have engaged in training programs for Central Asian military officers.

Most significantly, Moscow and Beijing have utilized the SCO as a platform for a collective security operation in Central Asia, sponsoring both bilateral and multilateral Russian and Chinese exercises with local regimes and with each other on an annual and expanding basis since 2003. The SCO's utility to Moscow and Beijing does not end here. While significant differences exist between Russia, China, and among the other members and observers (India, Pakistan, Iran, Mongolia) as to whether the SCO should be mainly a promoter of trade and economic development, or a military alliance, or another energy forum that Russia

would dominate, or a basis for regional cooperation as Kazakhstan and the smaller states would prefer, it clearly has been envisioned by Beijing and Moscow since its inception as a forum for unifying Central Asian governments in an anti-American regional security organization.³⁸ Moreover, Russia and China clearly want it to be a regionally-exclusive organization of growing stature so that Central Asian states will not be members of any other similar organization, e.g., NATO, which could counter it.³⁹ Indeed the SCO's charter declaration of June 15, 2001, (before the 9/11 attacks on America) was clearly an anti-American policy document and reflected several months of Sino-Russian diplomatic labor in Central Asia.⁴⁰

The members also are divided as to whether its membership should expand to include the new observer states of Iran, Pakistan, India, and Mongolia.⁴¹ Nevertheless, Beijing openly and consistently proclaims the SCO to be a model for what it is trying to do in regard to Asian security in Southeast Asia and beyond, i.e., replace the U.S.-led alliance system in Asia with one of its own creation that is attuned to its interests rather than to U.S. and its allies' stated values and interests. As Joshua Cooper Ramo demonstrated recently, China's policies toward Central Asia, particularly the development of the SCO, exemplify the process by which China hopes to build a prosperous neighborhood under its auspices and thus shelter its exploding economic development from both internal and foreign threats.

Step one for the SCO was to build the group, the first multilateral group China had started on its own. Step two: expand it to discussions of trade, economics and energy. Step three: begin discussions on more substantive security partnerships. The SCO has gone so far as to conduct its own joint military maneuvers,

in China's Xinjiang Autonomous Region. This approach of deepening regional multi-level ties will likely be repeated in other forums, such as ASEAN + 3 grouping (ASEAN plus Japan, Korea, and China).⁴²

At the same time Russia sees it as an organization whose international importance and standing are growing.⁴³ Therefore, the United States should take this organization and its development seriously as a template for China's and Russia's, if not Iran's, broader foreign policy objectives.

Finally Moscow and Beijing have waged substantive, comprehensive, and systematic efforts to undermine the American presence in Central Asia due to U.S. support for democratic reform. These even include rehearsal of counter-revolutionary military operations. By doing so, they also consciously strive to foreclose even the possibility of such reforms in Central Asia. Thus they have become stalwart champions of the status quo which includes massive corruption, repression, and the promise of sweetheart deals, if not promises of support for Central Asian rulers' chosen heirs.⁴⁴ Since Russia's failure in 2004 to insert its own candidate for President of Ukraine and the ensuing Orange Revolution there, Russia, China, and local governments have advanced unceasingly and disseminated the idea that the United States, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), or the West in general were and are behind the so-called color revolutions, and are attempting to overthrow local governments and replace them with supposedly more pro-American and thus anti-Russian or anti-Chinese forces who have no domestic support.⁴⁵ Russian officials charge that such "pressure" which allegedly is interference in their domestic politics is "heightening tension" in the region.⁴⁶

As local dictators tend to believe that they are irreplaceable and that all opposition is external and terrorist in nature, this is an easy idea to sell. President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan publicly and forcefully criticized this new American policy in his address to the Kazakh parliament in February 2005, 3 months after his government stated that it was not changing its foreign policy. Indeed, in his State of the Union speech of February 18, 2005, he explicitly said,

Today we are witnessing superpower rivalry for economic dominance in our region. We have to address correctly this global and geoeconomics challenge. We have a choice between remaining the supplier of raw materials to the global markets and wait [ing] patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the Central Asian region. I choose the latter.

It is easy to sell this idea especially when it is backed by a relentless state-run media campaign from Moscow, Beijing, and the local regime, and when there is no effective or coherent response, as has been the case with U.S. policy. Although the United States had spent \$43.7 million in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan as of August 2005 to support independent press operations, it is clear that this effort is too little, too late.⁴⁸ Indeed, it fairly may be said that Washington apparently still does not have any effective or discernible public information policy in Central Asia to advance its case and neither did it even take the idea of rebutting these charges seriously.⁴⁹ Consequently, the United States is paying the price for its complacency and neglect. Thus U.S. policies in regard to security, energy access, and democratization are under attack in Central Asia from the local dictators, Russia, China, and to a lesser degree, Iran.

The Afghan Threat.

Adding to the difficulties is that America faces a resurgent Taliban backed up with enormous drug revenues, Pakistani support, and an inconsistent international effort to rebuild Afghanistan, while its government remains weak and unsure of itself. Indeed, on July 21, 2006, General David Richards, the most senior British commander in Afghanistan, described the situation there as being “close to anarchy” thanks to the conflicts between private and foreign funding agencies, corrupt local officials, and the lack of control over forces moving back and forth over the border with Pakistan. He also described NATO forces as being short of equipment and “running out of time to meet the expectations of the Afghan people.”⁵⁰ Similarly General James Jones (USMC), then Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), stated that, in fact, “We’re not making progress; we’re losing ground” in cracking down on narcotics cartels that help fund Taliban insurgents as well as al-Qai’da in Afghanistan. He also stated that the answer there is not primarily a military one.⁵¹ Even if the dispatch of NATO forces into the South temporarily may have stemmed the Taliban offensive as has been recently argued, unless the underlying nonmilitary causes of their resurgence are addressed and overcome, we will be back in the same situation there in 2007.⁵² Indeed, NATO commanders admit that they were surprised by the strength of this Taliban resurgence and that military forces alone cannot win this war.⁵³ Moreover, the United States cannot relieve its forces in Afghanistan and withdraw them to other duties at least until March 2007.⁵⁴

The Deteriorating U.S. Position.

As a result of these attacks against the U.S. position in Central Asia, America has lost the base at Karshi Khanabad, faces constant pressure in Kyrgyzstan—where its hold on Manas remains precarious—and elsewhere, and it and its NATO allies are fighting a revived and strengthened Taliban under conditions that are in many ways less favorable than in 2001. Worse yet, a situation where only Russia and possibly China can engage Uzbekistan decisively during a crisis, while Washington is wholly excluded from doing so, is a strategic loss for America. Indeed, Professor Alexander Cooley of Barnard College wrote that “This eviction represented the worst of all possible outcomes for the United States. The United States did not receive credit for standing on political principle and voluntarily leaving K2, nor did it manage to secure operational use of the base.”⁵⁵

Uzbekistan evidently listens only to Moscow and Beijing, and America certainly is not Kazakhstan’s priority partner even under the best of circumstances.⁵⁶ Therefore, the State Department’s hope of relying upon Kazakhstan as potentially America’s strongest partner in Central Asia and as a potential leader for advancing the goals we wish to see there is fundamentally unsound and cannot serve as a basis for a successful U.S. policy in the future.⁵⁷ Certainly one cannot truly call Kazakhstan “a corridor for reform” as Secretary Rice has done, while its domestic developments incline in the opposite direction.⁵⁸ Although Kazakhstan has made numerous proposals for regional cooperation among the local governments and occasionally has stood up to Russia by selling gas to Georgia and joining the BTC pipeline, its calls for regional integration have

gone nowhere, and the limits upon it for independent action are quite clear because its primary orientation, as a series of recent deals reconfirms, remains Russia.⁵⁹ Indeed, as one Russian news report observed, “not once in the years of independence has Astana’s policy gone counter to Moscow’s interests.”⁶⁰

While Kazakhstan will continue to work with Washington on pipeline issues, to obtain equipment and training for its self-defense in and around the Caspian, take part in the PfP, and accept foreign investment, nobody should expect it to be a leader in Central Asia on Washington’s behalf against Moscow and Beijing and forego the balanced policy its government rigorously follows.⁶¹

Neither should the U.S. Government ignore opportunities for comprehensive engagement with all the other states. Indeed, doing so would be a serious mistake. As Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Daniel Fried has said, America “cannot and will not have a one-dimensional relationship with any country in the region based solely on security concerns or economic interests.”⁶² Similarly, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense James MacDougall has observed that, “You cannot allow your security interests to prevent the agenda of political development, and you cannot prevent your agenda of political development from stopping your interests in the security and energy fields. These have to go hand in hand.”⁶³ Any U.S. Central Asian policy must take advantage of every opportunity to interact productively with all of the local governments.

Conclusions.

To regain its footing in Central Asia, the United States must first understand where it has gone astray.

U.S. mistakes consist, first of all, in shortcomings in its own policy processes and equally, if not more importantly, in its policies as seen in and from Central Asia. The administration cannot recover the American position in Central Asia without addressing both sets of issues quickly and decisively. First of all, the policy process, including the interagency process, with regard to Central Asia and many other issues, e.g., Korea and Russia, and security cooperation in general, is broken.⁶⁴ Indeed, some analysts and observers believe that there is no such thing as a regular policy process, and that this has happened because the administration prefers it that way.⁶⁵ Often the Pentagon was sought to arrogate ever more control of foreign policy under its auspices and take a hard line in so doing or else administration officials are divided against each other with no clear line being able to emerge.⁶⁶ Or alternatively, the State Department invokes democratization and democracy as absolutes and elevates values to interests, e.g., that the main agenda item in regard to Central Asia is democracy, not security interests, thus blocking consideration of other alternatives. Indeed democratization trumps the latter in its view.⁶⁷

For example, in advance of an October 2005 trip to the region by Secretary Rice, Assistant Secretary Fried proclaimed that, "U.S. interests in advancing political and economic reform in the region will not be subordinated to security concerns."⁶⁸ Thus the Pentagon emphasizes U.S. strategic interests in the region, while the State Department emphasizes democracy as its main priority and invokes President Bush's statements on the subject dating back to his second inaugural.⁶⁹

Under conditions of the war in Afghanistan and on terrorism beginning in late 2001, American security interests naturally prevailed in U.S. policy towards

the region and in its assistance packages. Central Asian leaders realized soon enough that this situation translated into a freer hand for them as long as they gave the right verbal assurances about ameliorating the internal conditions in their own countries that give rise to unrest. Once Western funders, including the U.S. Government, grasped this reality, their sources of funding for institutional and other reforms began to dry up under pressure of domestic declines in spending on democracy promotion and heightened regional repression. Thus the Bush administration's rhetoric on democracy was belied by the fact that it steadily spent less and less money on democratization projects in 2003-05, and the funds involved were relatively small to begin with. And since there was no real penalty for Central Asian leaders who disregarded the imperatives of reform at home for their own security, by 2005 U.S. policy in the area had neither carrots nor sticks with which to secure its overall objectives. Consequently, that policy and its instruments, like the base at Karshi Khanabad, were vulnerable to any reversal of fortune that came our way.⁷⁰

In the wake of the loss of the base at Karshi Khanabad, it is not altogether clear if we have assimilated the lesson of our earlier failed policies and refined our objectives into a coherent strategy for attaining them. Assistant Secretary Fried's remarks, cited above, show that the values of democracy and human rights now take precedence over national interests relating to defense and security, particularly as regards the war on terrorism. Fried further announced that U.S. security and democratization interests were indivisible. While this kind of rhetoric makes its authors and audiences feel good, it certainly cannot constitute a foreign policy or effective diplomacy. For example, it does not explain

how we will reconcile these two strands of policy when faced with a tangible choice between them. Thus, it cannot serve as the basis for a coherent policy. We saw this in the U.S. Government's uncoordinated and ultimately ineffectual response to the crisis generated by the Andijan massacre in 2005 that led to our ouster from Karshi Khanabad.⁷¹

Nevertheless, these sentiments accurately reflect Secretary Rice's remarks that "the greatest threats to our security are defined more by the dynamics within weak and failing states than by the borders between strong and aggressive ones."⁷² Furthermore,

Our experience of this new world leads us to conclude that the fundamental character of regimes matters more today than the international distribution of power. Insisting otherwise is imprudent and impractical. The goal of our statecraft is to help create a world of democratic, well-governed states that can meet the needs of their citizens and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system. Attempting to draw neat, clean lines between our security interests and our democratic ideals does not reflect the reality of today's world. Supporting the growth of democratic institutions in all nations is not some moralistic flight of fancy; it is the only realistic response to our present challenge.⁷³

Thus we have laid down a marker to Central Asian and presumably all CIS governments. At the same time, such statements, no matter how strong, can only alarm local governments further concerning our predictability and their stability. They also ultimately lead to a situation where U.S. Government officials either make futile protests to deaf governmental officials or else they end up trying to dictate to CIS governments how they should democratize so that the "right results" come out.⁷⁴

One of the dangers of such policies is that it leads us into either too great an immersion in the domestic politics of targeted countries or to the charge of a double standard since it is impossible to pursue this policy practically with all countries in the world with equal intensity. And, indeed, we are not doing so on a global basis with equal intensity; so, in any case, such a policy is impossible physically as well as morally and strategically dubious.

Therefore, while such statements make powerful rhetoric, in Central Asia, according to expert observers, they are empty and irrelevant to the realities there.⁷⁵ Moreover, they contribute to the undermining of U.S. strategic and security objectives because they feed the belief that those promoting democracy are working for an elitist foreign concept that is alien to local realities and traditions and that seeks to undermine either local or central authorities. Allegedly, according to this view, the purpose of the campaign for democratization is to unseat reigning rulers and, since Central Asian authorities believe that the only real opposition is Islamic terrorists, America's position fuels their belief that it neither understands the region nor their interests.⁷⁶ If democratization is America's first priority there, then it has given the region over to Russia and China, for both Washington and Moscow have convinced local leaders that their aforementioned beliefs about U.S. policy are correct, whatever the real truth might be. As the Hudson Institute's Zeyno Baran remarked about Vice President Cheney's May 2006 trip to Kazakhstan and praise for the authoritarian regime there,

If the United States continues to balk at dealing with leaders of energy-producing countries because of democracy concerns, then soon there won't be any more democracies in the region to participate with. You can

say all you want about how we will not take part in these great games, but Russia and China are taking part in them, and the United States risks losing out.⁷⁷

Obviously a Russian- or Chinese-dominated Central Asia is hardly compatible with any progress towards democratization.

Second, this contradiction within the U.S. Government's policy process implies to local elites that America also is not truly serious about democracy. Moreover, and third, since the United States has cut back steadily on economic assistance to Central Asia, including Afghanistan, it also has stimulated the belief that it does not understand the area, or that it will not stay the course, and that Central Asia means less to it than the previous rhetoric would otherwise imply.⁷⁸

Fourth, America's and Europe's refusal until quite recently to address the issue of Afghanistan's drugs has led to an explosion of the scourge of narcotics across Central Asia and reinforced the belief of American and Western inattention to local states' true security interests and needs.⁷⁹ Fifth, the U.S. failure to devise a viable information policy that is tailored to this region's mores, cultures, and special needs, has reinforced all those previous negative feelings, while also leaving the Russians and Chinese to operate with total freedom in support of regressive rulers or corrupt dictators. Sixth, the United States has failed to foresee what might happen in states that are so misgoverned that violence is likely, either through economic distress, or through a succession crisis. Thus its reactions have been uncoordinated and haphazard with resulting negative consequences for U.S. policy that are visible to all. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are likely to be failed states when the present rulers leave the scene, and in Uzbekistan we have already seen, as has the

Uzbek government, that it is vulnerable to both violent incitement and to outbreaks of public violence.⁸⁰

America lost its position in Uzbekistan, not because it championed human rights but because Washington neglected to take it seriously, address its real problems, or answer its queries as to what our plans were regarding the base at Karshi Khanabad; pay off Islam Karimov, its President, and the other members of his government and family as it did in Kyrgyzstan; and because of the accumulated outcomes that are traceable to the aforementioned defects of our policy process.⁸¹ Indeed, Washington refused to give answers to Uzbekistan's persistent queries that began in 2002 as to its ultimate objectives regarding the base there.⁸² In 2004 Assistant Secretary Craner testified that,

Central Asia has a major strategic importance for the United States and Uzbekistan inevitably plays a key role in our policy toward the region. It occupies, as we know, a core position in Central Asia. It has, by far, the largest population, and it is the guardian of a centuries long tradition of enlightened Islamic scholarship and culture. And it boasts the largest and most effective military among the five countries.⁸³

Yet today, due to those policy failures, Washington has little or no dialogue with this state, and formerly pro-American politicians like former Defense Minister Golunov are disgraced publicly because of their ties to the United States. These trends take place even though the recent successful removal of nuclear materials from Uzbekistan shows that such dialogue can be sustained if the issue is sufficiently vital.⁸⁴

Seventh, NATO's continuing divisiveness and dilatoriness about sending troops to Afghanistan and giving them sufficiently robust rules of engagement

has slowed American and allied ability to counter the Taliban resurgence, especially as America has reduced the number of troops there.⁸⁵ Since NATO is trying to stabilize the country with only about half the number of troops that Moscow sent there in 1979-89 in its abortive effort to Sovietize Afghanistan, it appears that more troops might be needed. So the current level of NATO commitment probably will not suffice even on a purely military level, let alone the political and state-building level. Eighth, America has failed to press the international community sufficiently strongly to make good its pledges to Afghanistan which are still lacking, without which reconstruction there will be greatly prolonged, if it is even successful.⁸⁶

Finally, and ninth, in regard to Afghanistan, there is the unsolved problem of Pakistan. It is almost axiomatic that Afghanistan cannot be pacified if the border with Pakistan is unpoliced, and insurgents have free rein to come and go as they please. Yet, unfortunately, this is precisely what is happening. Since 9/11, Pakistan has been forced to accept formally the fall of the Taliban. Nevertheless, considerable evidence suggests that it is assisting the Taliban to regroup in and around the Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas.⁸⁷ Moreover, it recently has signed a peace agreement with the tribes in Waziristan and other regions that border Afghanistan, suggesting its inability or unwillingness (if not both) to deal firmly with the terrorist enclaves there. As one assessment of this accord observes, it probably formalizes a situation of continuing cross-border destabilization from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

As part of this agreement, the Pakistani military will cease its unpopular military campaign in the semi-autonomous North Waziristan region. In exchange, the local Taliban militants will halt their attacks on

Pakistani forces and stop crossing into nearby eastern Afghanistan to attack Western and Afghan forces hunting Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants. For Pakistan, this was an acceptance of the ground reality that its military would never be able to defeat tribal militants in a region where Pakistan's writ has never extended. For the critics, however, the deal amounts to giving an effective amnesty to the insurgents, allowing them even more freedom to cross into Afghanistan and pursue their militant agenda. While Pakistani officials claim that foreign militants can stay in the region only if they obey Pakistan's laws and stay away from militancy, it is unclear how this can be enforced in a region that has become even more out of bounds for the Pakistani government after this agreement.⁸⁸

Recommendations.

A successful policy must learn from these mistakes and surmount them. Therefore the administration must undertake the following steps. First, it must repair the broken policy process. The administration must decide what Central Asia's real importance is to the United States and assign sufficient material and political resources to back up that investment. Toward this end, the President and his cabinet must impose policy discipline on the players after arriving at a consensus among themselves on these issues. They must establish clear and coordinated interdepartmental priorities for the U.S. emplacement in Central Asia and then proceed to implement them. Given the existing situation throughout the region, the security and independence of these states must come first for otherwise no democratization is remotely conceivable. But this does not mean neglecting democratization as an issue. Rather, America must engage both governments and civil society or opposition groups who are not terrorists. It must engage governments with the argument that

they have signed international conventions upholding these practices and that the United States is not trying to supplant them, but rather ensure that their countries become both more secure and prosperous. Since their interest is at stake in a violent overturn, this argument may have some resonance. But it must be backed up by increased assistance and concrete economic and other policies that address their needs.

In this connection, it is essential to continue and upgrade the series of high-level visits by cabinet members and even Vice President Cheney, and reinforce those with visits by lower ranking officials on a regular basis to monitor policy implementation. It also might be useful to set up a governmental commission like the Gore-Chernomyrdin commission on Russia or subsequent commissions of this sort to ensure regular progress by both sides in a mutually-consultative process that addresses common needs and projects. Likewise, it is very important to come up with alternatives for regional association to Russo-Chinese projects. Therefore, reports of an expanded Pentagon-sponsored collaboration to combat the drug trade are to be welcomed, not just because Russian analysts fear they signify an anti-SCO ploy, but also because they show America means business with regard to Central Asian states' true security threats.⁸⁹ Given their not unfounded belief that America had ignored the drug problem that was becoming the most serious threat to their internal security because of its many ramifications, positive joint action against that scourge is decidedly welcome.

Similarly, in this context of overall concern for Central Asian security, it is imperative that America find ways to reestablish a viable policy dialogue with Uzbekistan, even if it only begins at a low level. As noted

above, U.S. policy cannot omit any local government that wishes to cooperate with it on a mutually beneficial basis.⁹⁰ U.S. Central Asian policy, to be successful, must not only be multidimensional, it must be all-inclusive, i.e., it must include even Uzbekistan. If this cooperation and/or dialogue are built on a solid foundation, even at a low level, then they can enable American officials to talk to that regime on issues of shared concern and rebuild mutual confidence. Clearly, while President Islam Karimov has thrown his lot with the Russians and Chinese for now, he fully understands the nature of whom he is dealing with in Beijing and Moscow. Even though he may wrongly feel he was betrayed by America, he probably cannot afford to become a total satellite of Moscow. Neither can America or its allies afford to let Uzbekistan fall into that trap, especially as it might turn again to violence at the first sign of Karimov's weakness or succession.

Second, having decided upon its priorities and having begun to implement them, the United States also must address NATO, the European Union (EU), and India, its new strategic partner in this area. They must devise an agenda or agendas of common activities oriented to achieving the objectives that they all share and then work to fulfill those agendas whether it be in the five former Soviet republics or Afghanistan. This applies as much to the integration of energy and electricity links either to Europe or to India and Pakistan, as it does to sustaining the comprehensive recovery of Afghanistan and victory over the Taliban.⁹¹

Third, it is essential that the U.S. Government quickly develop and put into practice a viable public information program using all the media at its disposal for Central Asia. This program must address the cultural framework of the region and present the

truth about American and other policies. Washington also must endeavor to retain and even open up every outlet available, like Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, to get the word out about events affecting this area. Under no circumstances can it concede either to Moscow or Beijing, or to local dictators, a monopoly over the means of information.

Fourth, the administration must devise rewards and punishments for those who would use the SCO as a means to eject us from Central Asia. This also means upgraded bilateral relations with local governments to strengthen them against Russo-Chinese pressures. While America obviously has a wide-ranging agenda with Moscow and Beijing, it should not give away its interests in Central Asia or those of Central Asian states in return for progress on other issues with Russia and China. For example, Washington and Moscow are about to negotiate on allowing Moscow to become a center for storing spent nuclear fuel and or for distributing it to states who wish to use it peacefully.⁹² While this can prove helpful with regard to Iran or even North Korea, behind it also lies Moscow's program to centralize all the CIS republics' nuclear energy operations under its control and thus dominate the entire field of energy in Central Asia and deprive those states of any independent access to use the energy buried in their own territories.⁹³ Therefore Washington must be careful with the way it approaches those two larger states. And as a general rule, it must engage the states around Russia or China as much as it does Russia and China in order to prevent a successful neo-imperial policy in Central Asia, or elsewhere for that matter.

Fifth, the United States must continue to offer these states—Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan in particular—the resources with which to defend their

sovereignty and territory independently of Moscow and Beijing if they so choose. Washington cannot allow Russia, China, and Iran to turn the Caspian Sea and Central Asia into a closed sea for their own exclusive benefit. Nor can it allow the Russian-sponsored CSTO to achieve recognition by NATO as the only legitimate organization providing for Central Asian defense that it so ardently craves, or for the SCO to be the only game in town when it comes to the provision of security.⁹⁴ This is because for NATO, according to Russian officials, Central Asia is “a zone of interests,” whereas for Russia it is a zone of “responsibility.”⁹⁵ This support for their military development becomes particularly critical if the United States will, as General John Abizaid (USA), Commander of U.S. Central Command, announced, reduce its presence in Central Asia but enhance military cooperation with local countries.⁹⁶ These programs entail expanded cooperation between all the relevant U.S. military services and Central Asian and Transcaucasian governments.

This can be done in numerous ways. One is to expand bilateral programs involving all the services with their opposite numbers in receptive Central Asian (and Transcaucasian) states. A second alternative is expanded reliance on NATO as a means of improving the quality and training of Central Asian militaries. NATO is now directing operations in Afghanistan. Moreover, it is also a priority security organization of choice for most post-Soviet states. Even Armenia is upgrading its military ties to the West and NATO significantly.⁹⁷ The new states seek to be identified as Western, and recognize that adherence to the PfP program provides meaningful enhancement of their security through affiliation, if not membership, in a nonpredatory multilateral and cooperative

security arrangement.⁹⁸ Furthermore, NATO is the only effective organization that provides a standard of measurable activity and security against such contemporary threats as terrorism, and proliferation.⁹⁹ NATO also has demonstrated its ability to provide security for Afghanistan's elections and to work on behalf of a broader security stabilization than simply a conventional peace support operation.

Expansion of international ties between Central Asian militaries and Western forces also could mean starting discussions to upgrade India's participation in the modernization and westernization of Central Asian forces. Those forces also could be introduced to the bilateral Indo-American exercises now being conducted among all the services so as to build strong trilateral working relationships based on experience and trust. The same applies to educational exchanges and expert dialogues. Certainly New Delhi and Washington share many critical interests in Central Asia such as prevention of terrorism and stabilization of Afghanistan. These fora would be ways to reinforce activities towards those ends and towards the larger end of helping to stabilize the Central Asian region as a whole. Admittedly, probably any program undertaken with India would anger Pakistan, especially if it embraced the new Afghan army. However, the initial scale of such activities could remain relatively small, be confined to the five former Soviet republics and take place under a primarily bilateral Indo-Central Asian umbrella. If the program is successful, then it could expand to bring Pakistan in as a confidence-building measure. In time, Pakistan's participation could help further integrate its military with Western democratic notions of conduct and provide a lasting institutional mechanism by which to influence it. Such

fora also could stimulate a regional dialogue with India and the Central Asian militaries or governments that would be mutually beneficial to all parties. It should be pointed out that all these aforementioned possibilities for increasing our partners' participation in these programs in the former Soviet Union require intergovernmental agreements and intense detailed participation in these activities and exercises by all the services of those countries and the United States. Thus the U.S. Army, Navy (where appropriate) and Air Force all have roles to play in making such programs work.

Sixth, as stated above, U.S. economic activity must go beyond ensuring equal energy access to helping these states move forward on their overall independence, and economic and political development by supporting diversification of energy connections; helping them build pipelines to the seas and oceans, and allowing them to bring all their products more easily to Asian and European markets. But that policy also must include trade, investment, and financial instruments, and not be restricted to energy. This also includes supporting projects that would upgrade and integrate Central Asia's infrastructure so that economic ties among states and peoples can flourish more rapidly than would otherwise be the case. Only the United States is uniquely situated to do this, given its strong economic position and ties to international economic institutions, a trump card in its hand relative to both Moscow and Beijing, let alone Iran. Consequently such efforts must be intensified.

Seventh, while doing all this, the administration also must be upgrading our government's capability to act promptly in case of unforeseen contingencies. The State Department's Office of Reconstruction and

Stabilization, under Ambassador John E. Herbst, must be directed, if it is not doing so already, to begin planning for contingencies having to do with the real possibility of state failure in Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. If and when that occurs, it will usher in violent responses to that condition of state failure. Such chaos cannot be allowed to proceed in uncontrolled fashion or to abdicate U.S. real interests in the region. Adequate forecasting and rapid response policies, not only military ones either, must be thought through and implemented so that the United States is ready to move at a moment's notice, if necessary, and provide whatever assistance is needed to ensure stability. U.S. assistance to forestall state failure does not have to be military in nature. But it does need to be timely and well-focused. This is because it is clear, as noted above, that rival states like Russia already are discussing publicly potential intervention scenarios to forestall a Central Asian state's failure.¹⁰⁰

With regard to Afghanistan, America should undertake the following actions to maximize its chances for both victory and reconstruction under an enduring and legitimate government that is moving, however slowly, towards democratization. First, more pressure on Pakistan is needed to reduce, if not terminate, its support for the Taliban and other terrorists. The administration already has brought considerable pressure to bear upon the Pakistani government, but it and NATO cannot slacken their grip. If America's good offices are requested and acceptable to both sides, the administration also should use them with regard to the glacial but ongoing negotiations on Kashmir between India and Pakistan. Second, the United States should continue to promote India's overall ability to interact economically with Central Asia and Afghanistan, seek

pipelines and electricity outlets, as it is now doing not only to strengthen the individual economies and polities of the region, but also to build a foundation for greater and more enduring regional economic integration through infrastructural links that open up these areas to greater development. And it also should encourage the continuation of Indian support for the Karzai regime in Afghanistan.

Fourth, Washington needs to keep pushing NATO members to maintain, and if necessary expand, their commitment to Afghanistan and to provide their forces with sufficiently robust rules of engagement to get the job done on the ground. Fifth, while doing so, the administration also must pressure the international community to fulfill their pledges to the revival of Afghanistan and to join America in doing so in a way that strengthens the Afghan population's own capability to rule itself without external interference or tutelage. This also means a substantial offensive against the drug lords and the drug problem which is now the main financial pillar for the Taliban, if not other terrorist groups. Success in this particular campaign requires a comprehensive approach to the problem and can only be undertaken if there is sufficiently strong political will among all the players in and out of Afghanistan. And throughout this process, pressure must be kept on Pakistan to encourage it to terminate its policies of sheltering and supporting the Taliban and the terrorists who seek to operate in South Asia. As long as they have a safe haven, they will continue to destabilize both South and Central Asia, thereby negating America's best efforts in both regions.

While none of these recommendations for Central Asia and Afghanistan represents a panacea, especially if undertaken in ad hoc, individual, or incomplete

fashion, taken together they can provide a foundation from which the administration can move to repair its past policy shortcomings and retrieve at least some, if not all, of its past position here. If Central Asia is as important as former Deputy Secretary of State Armitage said it was, the administration must be prepared to demonstrate that importance in both word and deed and do so through a coordinated multidimensional strategy. This kind of strategy brings to bear all the instruments of policy, not just the military instrument, and does so in ways that leverage the superior ability of the United States and its allies to work for peace, security, liberty, and prosperity. Although this is going to be the work of years, if not decades and generations, it is incumbent upon Washington to begin now because if it does not seize this day and those that follow, the crises that could engulf this region will more likely than not do so soon. Thus the crisis will come more quickly and more violently than would otherwise have been the case. Then even all of the best efforts of the United States may not prove to be enough to avert those crises.

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