

# Building Security in Central Asia: a Multilateral Perspective

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Over the past decade, many actors—including Russia, the United States, and to a lesser extent multilateral security institutions—have sought to deepen their ties to the five Central Asian states for a myriad of reasons, not least being the presence of large oil and gas reserves. Russia views this region as within its sphere of influence and interest, and as a bulwark to instability coming from the south, specifically from Afghanistan, Iran, and potentially, India and Pakistan. Russia has supported the development of closer relations with the Central Asian republics on an economic, political and military level through the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), by including them in the security framework, the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST). With no shortage of bilateral and multilateral security treaties signed between them, the perception among many Western analysts in the mid 1990s was that Russia and Central Asia were clearly connected in the arena of security and defense.<sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and the subsequent war in Afghanistan, a combination of support pledged by Central Asian states to the U.S.-led coalition against terrorism and the need for such support have brought Central Asia into the international spotlight. But in deepening ties with these states, the West has become more acutely aware of the plethora of security challenges in this region, including extremely porous borders, high-level corruption, economic and energy insecurity, and the presence of groups determined to overthrow the current regimes. In short, there is a new appreciation in the West of Central Asia as a strategically crucial region at the crossroads of a variety of influences. Western states and institutions now are taking seri-

ously the security problems of the region and concerns of Central Asia's leaders. While Western governments continue to strengthen their security cooperation with these states, Western institutions continue to assist in the building of democratic regimes operating under the rule of law, the transition to market-oriented economies and the building of reliable security and economic institutions. Though progress in instituting reforms has been slow, security assistance to these states continues to grow. To date, security assistance to Central Asia has not been conditional on progress in the transition to democracy and other Western ideals.

The lack of an overarching security institution to manage security problems is mirrored in the proliferation of security threats to the region. The West and Russia are both attempting to fill the security vacuum that appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Because security concerns in this region are transnational by nature, it can be argued that transnational solutions are needed, and multilateral institutions could serve in helping these states build more effective regional ties on a number of security-related areas. However, finding multilateral solutions to regional security problems in Central Asia is no easy task. Regional cooperation is a contentious issue among these states as historic mistrust and animosity loom large, particularly between the two largest states, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Multilateral programs, both military and non-military, have met with limited success due to the difficulties associated with regional cooperation in Central Asia. The danger stemming from a lack of regional military cooperation is twofold according to Martha Brill Olcott, a leading specialist on the region. First, if these states were to pursue separate military developments, the inherent distrust in the region would not be alleviated and, in fact, could be exacerbated. Second, all of these states are militarily weak, and even the two largest, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, cannot provide for their own security.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter will investigate the prospects for multilateral cooperation in Central Asia and the steps to necessary address these challenges. The multilateral institutions that are discussed and evaluated for their effectiveness in the region include the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), the CIS, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),<sup>3</sup> and GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova).<sup>4</sup>

The key questions this discussion will address include:

- What are the most visible security threats in this region?
- What are key Western and Russian security interests in this region?

- What are the discernable benefits for the participants for their membership in multilateral or regional organizations?
- Which security issues tend to polarize the actors in the region?
- Which, if any, regional or multilateral institutions are best able to provide the types of security assistance that the Central Asian states really need?
- What are the implications for Central Asia in favoring one institution over another (e.g., NATO over the CIS)?

The challenges associated with improving security in this region will continue to capture the attention of Western states, Russia and also a growing number of regional organizations, in an attempt to improve the security situation and maximize influence in the region. There may be no quick fixes to the extreme security challenges in Central Asia. Yet it will be argued that an expanded involvement of Western multilateral security organizations can have a positive effect by facilitating regional security cooperation and helping to build mutual trust and confidence.

### **Security Environment Overview**

In order to better understand the consequences and potential benefits of multilateral engagement in Central Asia, it is first necessary to understand the security environment in which these states are operating. It should come as no surprise that the Central Asia region, a crossroads for a myriad of influences, including Slavic, Middle Eastern and Oriental, is experiencing instability along ethnic and religious lines. Moreover, a lack of economic reforms and free trade arrangements with the West, high levels of corruption and the remnants of a command economy structure left over from Soviet times add to regional stress. Although Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan inherited vast energy reserves from the USSR, the difficulty in extracting these resources thus far has hindered the economic development of the region. Non-military or “soft security” threats, such as the cross-border transit of terrorists, narcotics, small arms and materials associated with Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), are among the primary security concerns for the West, Russia, China and the Central Asian republics themselves.

Because border security threats are transnational by nature, many institutions and states, as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector (especially energy-oriented businesses), have sought to support Central Asian states in their attempts to improve the border security situation. Assistance offered varies, but is primarily focused on pro-

viding training and equipment, as well as improving regional dialogue by holding a plethora of international conferences and seminars. Uzbekistan and Krygyzstan have received the greatest attention and resources because of the threat posed by terrorist groups in the region, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The IMU is seen as having links with al Qaeda as well as other radical Islamic fundamentalist groups, and desires to overthrow the government of Uzbekistan and create an Islamic state. Until recently there have been few mechanisms for successfully regulating the border situation, although the United States has provided a significant amount of resources—over \$82 million in FY02 for the largest program, the Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) assistance program, as well as several other smaller initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Central Asia Security Vacuum**

For the first five years following the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics were not a priority for the West, primarily because these states were viewed as within Russia's sphere of influence. As a result, the United States, NATO, and the EU paid little attention to the region, even given the presence of large untapped oil and gas reserves. America provided no substantial economic aid packages to Central Asia and focused instead on assisting the western Newly Independent States (NIS) of Ukraine and Moldova. The South Caucasus states (Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia) were also higher on the priority list. The Central Asian republics had no "Western card" to play to counter Russia's influence in the political, economic, energy or military spheres. Further, given objections from Russia to U.S./NATO military or political outreach to these states, NATO did not attempt to reach out to Central Asia. With no Western security option for Central Asia, they retained their relatively tight security cooperation within the CIS framework.

Russia attempted to fill the security vacuum in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) by encouraging greater cooperation among CIS members. The creation of the CIS, and subsequent attempts to deepen cooperation in a number of key sectors, was an attempt to increase dependency on Russia and to create some kind of "institutional normalcy" in the region in place of the Soviet Union. In the security sphere, the Tashkent CST of 1992 was signed by seven states including Russia, Belarus, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Krygyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, and accorded Russia leverage over its less powerful neighbors. The extent of these security ties between CST affiliates has varied over time in response to political and economic leverage exercised by Russia. Moreover, the individual members have differing

relations with other actors in the region and with the West, which impacts their participation in the CST collective security framework.

Importantly, Uzbekistan refused to sign the second phase of the CST when it was proposed, which took place prior to September 11. Therefore, Uzbekistan was not in Russia's official security sphere when the United States went in to try to negotiate basing rights on Uzbek territory. As a result of Uzbekistan's post September 11 role in the War on Terrorism, Uzbekistan's security ties with America have been improved in the form of a "Strategic Partnership" signed in March 2002. This agreement calls for the United States to "regard with grave concern any external threat" to Uzbekistan.<sup>6</sup> Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and to a lesser extent, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan also have become important U.S. coalition partners and like Uzbekistan have received a considerable increase in security assistance over the past year. Although Russia is no longer unilaterally able to dictate the foreign and security policy orientation of the Central Asian states, common interests still remain between the CIS states and Russia, and Russia remains influential in the region.

In the mid 1990s, Russia's economic trade, as well as its military cooperation with Central Asian states, began to decline. Russia's main security role centered on the sale of military supplies, a peacekeeping contingent in Tajikistan, and coordination with these states over anti-terrorist measures.<sup>7</sup> During this time, the Central Asian states (with the exception of Tajikistan which was heavily involved in a civil war) also sought to diversify their international relations with actors outside the confines of the CIS. New trends included deepening relations with China, Turkey and Iran, in addition to the United States and other Western countries. Zbigniew Brzezinski noticed this shift in the late 1990s and called for a change in the U.S. strategy, to "consolidate and perpetuate the prevailing geopolitical pluralism on the map in Eurasia" in response to what he saw as a shift in the international orientation of some of the Central Asian states.<sup>8</sup>

The United States first showed interest in playing some kind of role in the security vacuum in Central Asia in the late 1990s as U.S. policymakers grew concerned over increases in small arms, narcotics trafficking, and terrorist movement across the porous Central Asian borders. Moreover, the shift of IMU to insurgency tactics as well as the increasing effectiveness of the IMU, encouraged the Department of Defense (DOD) to conduct Special Forces exercises in the region. U.S. Special Operations forces thus began engaging in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 2000 (more modestly in Kyrgyzstan). The widely held perception in the United States was that, left to their own devices, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek governments would adopt

the same tactics as Russia in Chechnya, if they were not shown alternative methods for dealing with insurgencies.<sup>9</sup>

The strategic interest in Central Asia among the United States, Russia, China, Iran and Turkey in filling the security vacuum has led to a situation of free competition, which has the potential to result in a zero-sum game for Central Asia. The inherent danger is that the region will become further divided, with each state preferring to develop ties on a bilateral basis with prominent states and institutions to improve their individual security situation, without reference to each other. The inability of Western institutions to agree as to their specific roles or to identify gaps and redundancies regarding the kinds of assistance and programs offered only exacerbates this situation. Instead, what is needed is cooperative dynamics with common ground for joint solutions in the framework of multilateral groups and organizations.<sup>10</sup>

As will be discussed in the forthcoming sections, a variety of security arrangements are taking shape in Central Asia to fill this need. Included in these arrangements is the establishment of new bilateral and multilateral ties, focused on military and non-military security issues. The success of these new multilateral arrangements will depend upon three factors: the Central Asian states' perceived value in participating; the internal and external dynamics that both reinforce and curtail the development of such ties; and the ability of the institutions to contribute in a tangible way to regional security. The following section is an overview and analysis of the more prominent multilateral security organizations and arrangements, and an evaluation of their ability to address real-time security concerns of the Central Asian nations.

## **Looking West**

### ***NATO***

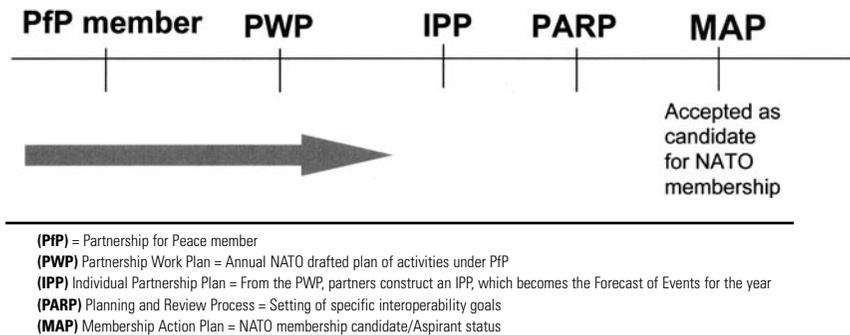
NATO's philosophy of expanding security and stability eastward and southward in the region means that, in theory, NATO should become more intrinsically involved in the security of the states of the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia. But traditionally, NATO has placed much more emphasis on the Baltic states, Russia and Ukraine, showing less of an interest in engaging the South Caucasus and Central Asian states, the latter viewed until recently as almost entirely outside NATO's purview within the Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework.

While direct contact between NATO and the Central Asian states throughout the mid to late 1990s was modest, NATO allies did monitor

and participate in U.S.-led multilateral exercises with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan conducted “in the spirit of” Pfp. Multilateral exercises such as the *CENTRABAT/Regional Cooperation* series, which consisted of tabletop and field exercises in the realm of peacekeeping, were held.<sup>11</sup> Also, the Central Asian partners have participated for several years in the annual International Workshop on Emergency Response (IWER), also an “in the spirit of” Pfp multilateral exercise aimed at improving their preparedness in consequence management and disaster relief.

Operating under an “open door” policy, NATO uses the various tools at its disposal to work with partners. These tools allow for maximum cooperation between the Alliance and individual partners, assisting along a continuum to the extent desired by the partner. Beginning with membership in Pfp, countries are encouraged to deepen their relationship with NATO by participating in specific mechanisms, while setting interoperability, defense, and economic reform goals to jointly measure progress along the way. Figure 16–1 is a sketch of NATO’s integration progress:

Figure 16–1. NATO Integration Progress



There is no set time for how quickly a partner should move through this process; it is up to the individual partner to determine the level and scope of cooperation with the Alliance. Geopolitical developments play a large role, and the reaction of Russia has been an important concern for all FSU states. However, because Russia and NATO have improved their relations due in part to the War on Terrorism, Russia’s objections to the FSU states’ ties with NATO have waned. Ukraine and Georgia officially have stated their intention to join MAP (declaring the desire to join NATO); Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan have joined the Planning and Review Process (PARP); and Tajikistan has recently become a Pfp member.<sup>12</sup>

One could argue that the timing of these decisions is directly related to this new geopolitical environment, where Russia and NATO have established rapport in the NATO-Russia Council.

It is important to point out that NATO-Central Asia relations have met with some constraints, with more serious challenges along the way. Central Asian partners are, by and large, not enthusiastic PfP participants and prefer bilateral security ties with the United States and others, such as Germany. Indeed, Central Asian Ambassadors to NATO and their staffs do not actively participate in discussions at NATO Headquarters and in military planning discussions at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE).<sup>13</sup> One reason why NATO has been less successful in drawing Central Asia closer to the West is that NATO advocates a model for its engagement with partner countries in Eurasia, which is focused on improving regional cooperation. Although this model has been successful in promoting regional cooperation in Eastern Europe, and even in the Western FSU, its application to a region in which deep distrust characterize the state of relations is a continuing challenge. However, given NATO's positive track record for spurring regional cooperation elsewhere in Europe and Eurasia, hope still exists. The difficulty is finding the right 'carrot' to extend to the Central Asian partners, since the Central and Eastern Europe carrot of NATO membership is not viable in the near future. NATO either has to be more encouraging and accepting of Central Asian states as partners by offering increased resources to spur defense reform and military professionalization, or it has to offer a diversification of activities within the confines of PfP to address the security needs in this region, such as improved border security.

Another challenge in bringing the Central Asian states closer to NATO and Western Europe involves providing training and equipment to improve their defense self-sufficiency. NATO is often a slow mover in terms of planning and executing security assistance programs, and does not have the money to provide extensive, capacity building assistance. The tool that NATO has at its disposal to improve interoperability, confidence building, and regional cooperation is the PARP. This process assists in both defense reform and restructuring, and is certainly noteworthy as a beneficial method of engagement. For the most part, participation in PfP has not been a political or military issue for Central Asian states, although the financial burden often stymies their involvement.<sup>14</sup> PARP, on the other hand, requires partners to disclose information on the state's range of defense and military capabilities, along with details about the force structure

and the defense budgets, all of which is viewed as extremely intrusive by the Central Asian states.

Other FSU partners, such as Ukraine and Georgia, have participated in PARP, disclosing such “sensitive” information, and acknowledging the importance of improving regional cooperation, information sharing, interoperability and defense reform. As a result, they have moved closer to Western security structures. In theory, if Central Asian states follow a similar path, it is likely that they will move closer to NATO in the sense of improving interoperability and possibly, security agreements down the road. The challenge for NATO is to ensure that the mechanisms for building partnerships in Central Asia are appropriate to the needs of these countries in their threat-driven security environment. Both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan joined PARP after September 11, which is a significant step forward, but the cooperation can still be improved.<sup>15</sup> Elements of Pfp could include, for example, more focused exercises to improve infrastructure, military support to civilian authorities in a crisis, and regional cooperation to counter the transnational security threats. In short, NATO must ensure that the Pfp activities are relevant to the security needs of all of Central Asia. Otherwise, NATO runs the risk of being an ineffective multilateral engagement tool for this region, and encouraging these states to seek bilateral security assistance from the United States and other countries. However, NATO has something unique to offer to its partners: a proven forum for increasing security cooperation among actors in a given region, as well as a tested “open door” policy. The circumstances and incentives are different for Central Asia, but the institution has many mechanisms available to assist its partners in building solid relationships with NATO and with each other.<sup>16</sup>

### ***European Union***

In addition to NATO, the EU also offers some positive incentives for the Central Asian states. The EU’s relations with Central Asian partners have a legal basis in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which guide political and economic discussions.<sup>17</sup> Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan have concluded PCAs with the EU, though the agreement with Turkmenistan has not yet entered into force. No PCA has been concluded with Tajikistan yet, though with the civil war now ended, it is likely that negotiations could be underway soon.

The PCA was intended as a mechanism to establish a stronger political relationship in the developing network of Central Asia’s connection with the EU. On the economic side, the PCA marks an important step in

helping to bring these states in line with the legal framework of the single European market and the World Trade Organization (WTO). The PCAs concluded between the EU and its partners are intended to facilitate the development of free trade, and can be seen as a road map for the introduction of economic and trade-related policies in the fields of goods, services, labor, current payments, and capital movement. Although the document is in many ways evolutionary, its implementation is a precondition for the development of further trade and political relations between the parties.

Moreover, the European Commission Technical Assistance to the CIS (TACIS) program assists partner states, including Central Asia, by focusing on the promotion of cooperation in the areas of environment, networks (telecommunications, energy and transport), justice and home affairs. Their focus is on certain cross-border issues, including the activities of sub-regional cooperation bodies and initiatives.<sup>18</sup> In addition, the Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia (TRACECA) program of 1993 aims to bring together trade and transport ministers from the original eight TRACECA countries (five Central Asian republics and three Caucasian republics). The goal is to develop a transport corridor on a west-east axis from Europe, across the Black Sea, through the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea, and onto Central Asia.<sup>19</sup> Uzbekistan in particular is hoping to capitalize upon its geopolitical position as the pivot in regional trade once the TRACECA program establishes a new "Silk Road," which will span from China to Western Europe. TRACECA hopes to attract investments from international financial institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which have committed U.S. \$250 million, and the World Bank, which has pledged an additional U.S. \$40 million towards the completion of the project.<sup>20</sup> TRACECA projects are deemed essential for the diversification of the traditional Moscow-centered trade and transport flows and for opening trade routes to the West.

Moreover, while there appears to be some movement in the area of EU support for police training centers and potential cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as well as improved border security measures in the region, in general Central Asian security issues are simply not at the forefront of the minds of bureaucrats in Brussels, and the EU does not have enough money to begin with.<sup>21</sup> The EU, as opposed to NATO, primarily focuses on "soft security" matters such as trade, water management, and other environmental security concerns in Central Asia. Politically, the EU relies on the PCA to guide discussions between the Central Asian partners and the EU Commission. But until a partner reaches the status of "Associate Member" (i.e., candidate for EU

membership), the tangible benefits of this association are not as significant, particularly for Central Asia, which is still widely perceived by the EU as outside its immediate area of interest. Although NATO is taking a slightly more proactive role through PfP, Central Asia is still lower down on the totem pole compared to the Western CIS and the South Caucasus, particularly Georgia and Azerbaijan.

## Looking Northwest

### *Commonwealth of Independent States*

In the security and defense sphere, the CIS CST serves as the primary means for Russia to maintain leverage over the Central Asian states. The Treaty, as well as a series of initiatives to develop a CIS customs union (CIS-wide and later between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan<sup>22</sup> and Tajikistan), was given greater impetus by a 1995 decree issued by Russian President Boris Yeltsin. The decree detailed a new direction for the CIS on closer security cooperation and embodied the belief that the CIS is the basis for Russia's reconstitution as a great power. On defense and security matters, the decree sought to "stimulate intentions of the CIS state parties to unite in a defense alliance"<sup>23</sup> and urged all states to conclude agreements in the military infrastructure and to encourage Russian military bases on the outward perimeter throughout CIS territory. A key goal was obtaining an obligation from the CIS member-states to refrain from participating in alliances and blocs directed against any of the other CIS members, specifically NATO.<sup>24</sup>

Although the CST created a formal system of collective defense, it has been activated only for the limited purpose of consultation over threats posed by Afghanistan. The important question is whether, if the CST continues to exist, it can serve any utility as a mechanism to discuss and deal with security concerns of its members, including terrorist activities, and the cross-border movement of items relating to WMD, narcotics and small arms. Uzbekistan, for one, already has determined that the CST does not have an important regional security role to play, as evidenced by its withdrawal from the arrangement, and Uzbekistan has strongly indicated its preference for developing security relationships with the West. If the Central Asian states themselves are continuing to develop security relationships with actors outside the confines of the CST and Russia is continuing to loosen the strings on the CST, then it is difficult to see how it can remain viable.

The Central Asian states have attempted to distance themselves from Russia in a number of key areas, most recently in a collective proposal to establish a nuclear weapons free zone in the region, which was recently passed. The agreement has met with controversy in Moscow. Officials maintain that the CST allows Russia the right to redeploy nuclear weapons in Central Asia in the future, which is a disputed interpretation among the Central Asian states.<sup>25</sup>

The lack of enthusiasm for the CST and the CIS as a whole, with the notable exception of Russia, is exemplified by the fact that its members have not attempted to implement the economic and security agreements signed within the confines of the CIS, and actively seek to deepen their participation in other regional organizations. Overall, the CIS is widely viewed as an ineffective multilateral forum for dealing with regional security concerns. The rhetoric of the CIS is similar to that of the EU, but the CIS does not display the features of the EU, such as the Common Market, the Common Foreign and Security Policy, or the movement toward a shared identity.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Shanghai Cooperation Organization***

The prospects for a longer-term U.S. military presence in Central Asia have raised eyebrows not only in Russia, but also in China, which borders Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. China has been looking to expand its influence in this region, and together with Russia has been instrumental in establishing the SCO, which includes China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>27</sup> The SCO originally was created to resolve ongoing border disputes in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse. The broadening of the SCO's focus to a more institutionalized security organization was in response to the increased threat in the region from non-state actors, such as the IMU.

The states in the SCO have reached agreements on military reductions and confidence building, and the SCO has become a mechanism for consultations on trade, water and border security. Its primary goal, however, is to counter the spread of Islamic extremism and terrorism. However, it is important to note that China has not indicated a desire to offer security guarantees or provide a military presence in Central Asia. This fact reinforces the perception that Russia and the United States are the only powers that wish or intend to develop policy toward Central Asia from a more broad strategic perspective. At present, China's interests are more regionally or culturally defined, as opposed to strategic. China still perceives Central Asia as within Russia's sphere of influence, and Russia's

presence in Tajikistan has dissuaded China from developing an active strategy toward this war-torn country at its border. However, if Russia's influence within Central Asia continues to weaken, China may assume a more active role in advancing its energy and economic interests.

### **Looking Inward**

Unlike the multilateral organizations discussed above, what distinguishes those who follow is the participant's status in the organization—whether members are on an equal footing or whether there is a designated or implied leader. While members are supposed to have equal status in NATO, SCO, and CIS, this is not the case *de facto*. Russia is the dominant player in the CIS, Russia/China in the SCO, and the United States in NATO. However, in the OSCE; the Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUUAM) group; and others discussed below, members are considered to have equal status. This is an important distinction to make, since Central Asian states have a long history of being dominated by a larger power and remain relatively weak in comparison with their neighbors.

### ***Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe***

One of the main benefits of membership in the OSCE, as well as some of the other regional multilateral organizations, is that this organization is not dominated by one or two of the more powerful states. Members are officially on equal status with every other state. Thus, the OSCE is perceived as a real opportunity to gain international experience in decision-making, consensus-building and diplomacy.

The OSCE has prioritized Central Asia as a region in need of its support in the security arena.<sup>28</sup> The increased flow of illicit drugs, the presence of criminal groups, as well as the growing trafficking in human beings and firearms have captured the attention of the OSCE in recent years. The OSCE has established centers in Almaty, Ashgabad, Tashkent, and has sent a Mission to Tajikistan. Missions are established when more serious security concerns are perceived. These centers promote the implementation of OSCE principles and the cooperation of the participating Central Asian states within the OSCE framework. They also promote information exchange between OSCE bodies and Central Asian authorities at a multitude of levels.

The OSCE has attempted to re-focus its support to Central Asia post September 11, as evidenced in the Bishkek Conference on Security and Stability held in December 2001. This conference was co-sponsored by the

OSCE and the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention. Participants unanimously condemned terrorism in all its forms and expressed willingness to cooperate in improving their border security. The conference was deemed a success by participating authorities in terms of the discussions of counter-drug efforts and the establishment of new focuses, such as the transit of small arms and light weapons.<sup>29</sup> According to the OSCE's International Secretariat staff, some progress has been made in deepening cooperation in small arms and light weapons transfers within the OSCE forum, as well as the training of police officials in the five Central Asian states, although much remains to be done.<sup>30</sup> One idea is for the OSCE to focus on control of small arms and light weapons by employing an Information Technology (IT) tool to track activities and to help record proliferation hot spots.<sup>31</sup>

The Central Asian states pay dues into the OSCE as members, but are also recipients of OSCE financial support. According to OSCE officials, these circumstances encourage the Central Asian states to be more proactive in their discussions within OSCE fora. For example, the Tajik government recently proposed the establishment of regional training centers in Central Asia, each of which would specialize in a particular field or skill, such as border security, peacekeeping, disaster relief, or "niche capability," and provide for joint training across national lines, thus facilitating regional cooperation.<sup>32</sup> The argument can be made that membership in the OSCE accords a certain perception of freedom and flexibility for the Central Asian states by proposing concrete options for improving the security situation in the region.

### **GUAM**

The Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (GUAM) sub-grouping of pro-West, anti-CIS states is another example of a multilateral organization where the equality of members is emphasized. Uzbekistan was a member until June 2002 when it suspended its participation in the "GUUAM's" formal structures because it did not see much benefit to membership since the United States already was providing significant military and economic assistance and the other GUUAM members were relatively weak. But while the role of GUAM in promoting security in Central Asia has come into question after Uzbekistan pulled out, it is still worth considering because of the potential to promote regional dialogue and information sharing on critical security matters.

GUAM was founded in 1996 as a political, economic and strategic alliance designed to strengthen the independence and sovereignty of these

former Soviet Union republics, and after much delay was formally institutionalized in 2001 with a legal charter and secretariat. GUAM has become an important structure for enhancing dialogue on regional economic cooperation through development of a Europe-Caucasus-Asia transport corridor. It has also become a forum for discussion at various levels of existing security problems, promoting conflict resolution and the elimination of other risks and threats.<sup>33</sup>

At a meeting of GUAM Foreign Ministers in Yalta in July 2002, the decision was made to extend observer status of the organization to interested states. A communiqué announced that third states and international organizations might participate in GUAM activities, provided that they were interested in GUAM's work and promoted its objectives. No reference was made as to participation based on geographical location.<sup>34</sup>

Some of the key goals which unite GUAM's members include improving the economic situation; developing an energy transport corridor from Central Asia to Western Europe; improving border security; promoting a respect for human rights; building civil society and empowered and legitimate state institutions; and most important, solidifying the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of GUAM members separate from Russia and the CIS.<sup>35</sup> The latter is particularly important for Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan, though less so for Ukraine, which has been more successful in developing an independent status.

GUAM's geopolitical leanings toward NATO, the EU, and the West in general has led to backing from the United States and NATO since its inception.<sup>36</sup> GUAM continues to receive American support (Congress and DOD, in particular) stemming from the Silk Road Act of 1999. In summer 2003, with U.S. political and economic backing, GUAM announced an initiative to refocus its efforts on the war on terrorism, particularly on border security issues, such as immigration, terrorist movements, WMD, drugs, and small arms/light weapons transfers, which could very well improve GUAM's importance for the Central Asian states. This refocus on border security, coupled with U.S. backing, may draw Uzbekistan back in to the formal structures, as well as encourage other states in the region such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, to take part. Overall, GUAM serves as a mechanism to increase security in the region, provided its membership is expanded and tangible projects result from political initiatives.

Beyond GUAM, Central Asian leaders have advanced several other multilateral frameworks that should be noted. The Central Asian European Community (CAEC), established in 1994 by Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, is a consultative framework for addressing security con-

cerns. However, though membership was expanded to include Tajikistan in 1998, the forum has proven to be unable to influence the development of the region's economies in a significant way. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has proposed the creation of a Eurasian Union as a CIS alternative, but this proposal has not moved beyond the discussion stage. Nazarbaev also suggested the creation of an Asian variant of the OSCE—the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Uzbeks and Kyrgyz officials have offered their own proposals, one of which included an initiative to create a nuclear free zone, which has subsequently been approved by all five Central Asian states. However, it is clear that the majority of the proposals advanced by the Central Asian leaders remain on paper and thus are ineffective in terms of dealing with regional security concerns at this time. Still, the fact that proposals have been offered in the first place is significant, and should be encouraged in an effort to increase regional cooperation and to find common solutions to transnational security problems.

## Conclusions

The post-September 11 geopolitical environment, manifested in the U.S.-led Global War on Terrorism, has generated an unprecedented international interest in the Central Asian states from multilateral security institutions. Given the region's proximity to Afghanistan and potential for spillover of instability, each state's willingness (to varying degrees) to join the international coalition, and the potential for longer-term Western military presence in Central Asia, it is not difficult to understand the heightened interest in this region.

NATO and the OSCE arguably offer the best opportunities for the Central Asian states from a multilateral perspective. NATO has been successful in encouraging regional cooperation in eastern and southern Europe through PfP, even when significant tensions have been present. PfP exercises, for example, offer a forum through which the Central Asian states could improve their consequence management, disaster relief and other capabilities to respond to transnational threats. But the challenge for NATO is ensuring that PfP activities evolve to address the real-time security needs of the Central Asia partners, which may mean adding more border security type training activities, and perhaps expanding to include more agencies, such as the border guard, customs, ministry of interior, national guard, military police/law enforcement or other front-line security services.

The OSCE has representatives on the ground in each of the countries, which typically provides them with access to partner country officials. The OSCE tends to be more innovative in coming up with new programs for the Central Asia partners to address their security needs. The problem with the OSCE is that it does not have much money, and therefore, is dependent in part on the resources from other sources, such as the EU. But while the EU has limited money for projects in Central Asia, the EU member states are generally not that interested in this region, given its lack of geographic proximity and their own traditional focus on the Western Eurasian states. The EU, through the TACIS program, does offer a useful forum for multilateral discussions of transnational issues for the Central Asian states, but the EU tends to talk at the Central Asian partners, rather than to find common ground. Since the Central Asian states are also members of the OSCE, dialogue is generally better and on more even ground.<sup>37</sup>

The overall effectiveness of EU, NATO and OSCE activities in the region could be improved if these institutions collaborated to avoid duplication of effort and better identify gaps. The EU and the OSCE, in particular, tend not to coordinate their efforts very well. For example, the OSCE focuses on small/arms light weapons transfers and police training in the region, but collaboration with the EU on these matters is in its infancy. However, if these bureaucratic and resource issues can be resolved and working groups/activities established, the Central Asian partners would be well advised to take advantage of a joint OSCE/EU approach to the region. Such an approach would complement, without being in contrast to, the more capabilities-building assistance provided by the United States and NATO. Overall, the effectiveness of individual programs within multilateral institutions is hindered because of the overall lack of transparency and information sharing in the region, as well as a lack of understanding about the kind of assistance that Central Asian states truly need to address specific security threats.

In addition to Western multilateral avenues, if GUAM can come up with tangible projects for its members in the realm of border security, it would certainly be in the interest of the Central Asian states to take part. Even an informal network that facilitates the sharing of information and intelligence on border security issues would certainly be a worthwhile endeavor. The United States, NATO, OSCE and the EU are likely to take a greater interest in GUAM with a border security dimension, and may even provide the financial and political backing to move these initiatives along, thereby, attracting additional members from Central Asia and perhaps drawing back in Uzbekistan. But the original premise should come from

the partners themselves in a coordinated fashion in an effort to improve their own security—it should not be jumpstarted by the United States or other, more influential multilateral institutions.

The uncertain and often volatile security environment coupled with the authoritarian nature of the regimes in power present challenges for Western institutions. Given trends over the past five years or so, it is highly likely that the Central Asian states will continue to seek external assistance, and the authoritarian leaders of these regimes will continue to play up or even exaggerate the presence of an external threat, since an outside threat is useful in garnering additional resources from Western institutions on a bilateral basis. Although there is no doubt of the region's geopolitical importance, it is not in the long term interest of the West to provide security assistance and even security guarantees to undemocratic and corrupt regimes. Therefore, while multilateral institutions continue to deepen security cooperation with these states, simultaneous emphasis should be placed on building democratic regimes, governed by the rule of law and transitioning to market-oriented economies. After progress is made in these areas, these governments will be in a better position to deal with internal and external security challenges effectively and reduce their dependency on external actors.

The internal weaknesses of these states render them extremely vulnerable to outside influences, especially from Russia. Although Russia is itself rather weak, it is far stronger than all of the states in Central Asia combined, and while its direct influence over their domestic affairs has wavered in recent years, Russia is still the dominating military, political and economic force in the region. Russia's cooperation is also required in terms of bringing stability to the region. The extent to which Western-oriented multilateral institutions will be successful in developing closer relations with Central Asia from a security standpoint will depend on Russia's reaction and on the ability of these states to realize opportunities accorded to them through multilateral cooperation. It is therefore in the interests of the Western actors and institutions to actively work with the states of Central Asia to ensure that Western methods for dealing with instabilities are adopted.

But as Roy Allison points out, it is not clear yet whether the impulse to cooperate through multilateral initiatives is stronger than the pressures among the Central Asian states for fragmentation.<sup>38</sup> However, the opportunity exists for the prominent Western-backed security institutions to demonstrate the benefits of multilateral cooperation as a means of

improving regional security, and with this the condition of the region as a whole.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., *Central Asian Security* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Central Asia: Common Legacies and Conflicts" in Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., 32.

<sup>3</sup> Formally known as "Shanghai Five," which includes Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, changing its name after the accession of Uzbekistan in 2001.

<sup>4</sup> This organization previously also included Uzbekistan, at which time it was referred to as GUUAM. Uzbekistan suspended its membership in early 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with U.S. Department of State, Europe/Eurasia Coordinator's office, August 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Dana Milbank, "Uzbekistan Thanked for Role in War: U.S., Tashkent Sign Cooperation Pact," *The Washington Post*, March 15, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., 19.

<sup>8</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, "A Geostrategy in Eurasia," *Foreign Affairs*, 76, no. 5, (September/October 1997), 50-64.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) officials in March 2001, Tampa, Florida.

<sup>10</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., 18.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of U.S./NATO activities in Central Asia, see Jennifer D.P. Moroney, "Western Approaches to Security Cooperation with Central Asia", in Graeme Herd and Jennifer D.P. Moroney, eds., *Security Dynamics in the Former Soviet Bloc* (London: Routledge/Curzon, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Interviews conducted at NATO Headquarters with Defense Planning and Operations (DPAO) staff, Brussels, Belgium, May 14, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews at NATO Headquarters with US Mission to NATO, International Staff (Political Affairs), Brussels, Belgium, and U.S. Eurasia specialists at SHAPE, Mons, Belgium, May 15-16, 2002.

<sup>14</sup> NATO requires the partners to contribute a certain percentage to pay for the exercises.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with NATO official, NATO Headquarters, Brussels Belgium, May 14, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> Interviews conducted at NATO Headquarters with Political Affairs Division and Special Advisor's office, Brussels, Belgium, May 15, 2002.

<sup>17</sup> The PCA is the framework document by which progress is assessed in each of the FSU partners in bringing their economic, political, social, and legal structures in line with the *acquis communautaire* of the European Union.

<sup>18</sup> TACIS Strategy Paper, *Strategic Consideration 2002-2006 and Indicative Programme 2002-2003* (europa.eu.int).

<sup>19</sup> Interview with EU Commission officials, Brussels, Belgium, May 15, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> See URL <<http://www.traceca.org>> for further information.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with EU official responsible for Central Asia issues, London, October 15, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Uzbekistan left the CST in 1999 to join the GUUAM regional subgroup of anti-CIS states, and subsequently withdrew from GUUAM in June 2002.

<sup>23</sup> As discussed in Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1997), 65.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Nuclear-free Zone for Central Asia, *The Washington Post*, October 5, 2002, A14.

<sup>26</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Åslund, and Sherman Garnett, *Getting it Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace), 232.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon Loeb, "Footprints in the Steppes of Central Asia: New Blises indicate U.S. Presence Will Be Felt After Afghan War," *The Washington Post*, February 9, 2002.

<sup>28</sup> Interviews with OSCE International Secretariat Staff, Vienna, Austria, May 23, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with UN ODCCP office, New York, July 16, 2002.

<sup>30</sup> Interviews with OSCE International Secretariat Staff (External Affairs), Vienna, Austria, May 23, 2002. and discussions held at a Wilton Park (UK) conference on Central Asia and the Caspian, October 2003.

<sup>31</sup> URL: <[www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org)>, International Conference Held on Terrorism, Biweekly briefing, March 13, 2002.

<sup>32</sup> Multiple interviews with OSCE, U.S., and Danish officials, OSCE, Vienna, Austria, May 23, 2002.

<sup>33</sup> "The GUUAM Group: History and Principles," briefing paper, <[www.guam.org](http://www.guam.org)>, November 2000.

<sup>34</sup> See Communiqué of the Yalta GUUAM meeting, July 20-21, 2001 ([www.guam.org](http://www.guam.org)).

<sup>35</sup> <[www.guam.org](http://www.guam.org)>

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Western Support to GUAM, see Jennifer D.P. Moroney and Sergei Konoplyov, "Ukraine, GUUAM, and Western Support for Subregional Cooperation in Europe's Security Gray Zone," Jennifer D.P. Moroney, Taras Kuzio, and Mikhail Molchanov, eds., *Ukrainian Foreign Policy: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (Westport, CT: Praeger/Greenwood, May 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Interviews with OSCE International Secretariat Staff (External Affairs), Vienna, Austria, May 23, 2002 and discussions held at a Wilton Park (UK) conference on Central Asia and the Caspian, October 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Roy Allison and Lena Jonson, eds., 254.