

Regional Security Cooperation and Foreign Policies in Central Asia: A 21st Century “Great Game”?

Robert Brannon

At least three entities are engaged in crafting and implementing security policies in Central Asia—the United States, Russia and the Central Asian states themselves—each with its own set of perceived interests and threats. The United States is engaged in the Global War on Terrorism and views the region in terms of strategic access and resources. Russia still sees its relationship with the regional states in paternal terms, including perceived inherent rights of influence. Meanwhile, the Central Asian states are anything but monolithic in terms of foreign policy. While other international entities are certainly at play in the region, including China and the European Union (EU), this chapter focuses on the complexities of the U.S./Russian/Central Asian triangle and the national security issues at stake for all three players.

During the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit in Prague on November 20, 2002, U.S. President George W. Bush said:

Russia does not require a buffer zone. Instead, it needs to be surrounded by friends and neighbors. Russia is part of Europe and strong security in Europe is good for Russia. NATO enlargement does not threaten Russia because Russia has a special role in NATO, one that will strengthen the already strong ties between our two nations.¹

Although the President was speaking about Russia and NATO enlargement, he might well have been thinking of Central Asia when he mentioned buffer zones. Russia has long seen this region as a safety zone against threats to its security both real and perceived. The United States

thinks this is no longer necessary, arguing that collective security might be better achieved through closer alliances throughout the region.

What are Russia's interests in Central Asia and how does Russia view U.S. security cooperation with the Central Asian states? While President Vladimir Putin appears to have been able to marshal support within his government to tolerate a short-term American presence in Central Asia, what are the implications for a longer-term presence? What, exactly, are Russia's ultimate goals in the region? This chapter examines regional security cooperation from the standpoint of U.S. and Russian foreign policies in Central Asia. Within this context, it focuses on Russian tolerance for U.S. initiatives in the post September 11 strategic environment.

Before and After September 11

On June 28, 2000, barely six months into his term of office, President Putin issued a new foreign policy concept, asserting, "Today our foreign policy resources are relatively limited, and they must be concentrated in areas that are vital to Russia's interests."² Although the concept was based on work begun during President Boris Yeltsin's administration and put forth in Russia's new strategic concept and military doctrine published in 1999, the policy statements nonetheless reflected Putin's pragmatism with regard to optimizing Russia's position in world affairs, regardless of its faded superpower status. This foreign policy concept was again updated in October 2003.³

Described by Russia's Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov as a pragmatic effort to help the country solve its domestic problems,⁴ the June 2000 document offered a restrained but critical view of NATO and the West, highlighting the importance of Russia's ties to the Group of Eight (G8) and the EU. Along with criticizing the United States for pursuing a uni-polar foreign policy instead of adopting a more stable (in Russian eyes) multi-polar view of the world, the statement also took a swipe at U.S. plans to deploy a limited national missile defense system. Yet Putin appears to recognize the complexities of international relations for Russia as well as the United States and has thus far maneuvered adeptly. He told an interviewer in January 2001 that Russia "must get rid of imperial ambitions on the one hand, and on the other clearly understand where our national interests are and fight for them."⁵ Putin further put his own stamp on Russia's foreign policy for the future by declaring that Russia would be much better off "with" the West than "without."

Russian foreign policy in Central Asia is still in transition. Deeply embedded in the Russian psyche is the notion that Central Asian states

are simply “*nashi*,” the Russian word for “ours.” In both Tsarist and Soviet times, Moscow controlled the region by force and by altering traditional demographic boundaries almost capriciously along the way. With the break up of the Soviet Union and subsequent independence of the Central Asian states, the relationship has been slowly shifting away from a paternal one. Many in Moscow never really expected these new nations to be able to exist without considerable aid and assistance, which helped lead to the creation of spheres of influence, represented to an extent by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). As the dynamics within the region change so does Russian policy, which might be best described as tolerant in varying degrees.

Thus, even now, it is difficult to think of Russia’s policy toward the Central Asian states as “foreign.” After the break-up of the Soviet Union, most Russian analysts insisted that close ties with Central Asia were critical to national security interests. Many believed that geographic location; shared history; common production systems, infrastructure, and institutions; and old dependences on Soviet financial subsidies and the Moscow markets would guarantee a continued interest in extensive cooperation with Russia.⁶ They also believed that a shared sense of national identity, derived from a long history of cohabitation, had survived the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Unfortunately, these assumptions proved wrong.

While it was true that Central Asian leaders initially were reluctant to leave the Soviet Union, they soon realized that Russia had little role to play in their search for national identity and values. Throughout the early 1990s, Russia’s often erratic behavior also served to distance the Central Asian states from Russia politically. This feeling was expressed by Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Russia’s closest ally among Central Asian leaders, who spoke out in early 1997 about his disappointment with Russian policy.⁷ What had once been shared values among the Soviet republics were replaced by new or “national” identities, suspicions about Russia’s intentions, and pragmatic calculations about what Russia actually could provide. Instead of a security community including Central Asian states grouped around Russia, a web of bilateral agreements developed with strongly expressed sensitivities about issues of sovereignty.

Russia watched with concern as along its southern border independently-minded states began to shift their orientation in other directions. Of the CIS members, Uzbekistan became the most outspoken critic of Russia and the most eager to enter into cooperation with the United States. Turkmenistan limited its military cooperation with Russia on the grounds of its declared policy of “permanent neutrality.” As Russia saw its influence

in Central Asia decline, fears arose that its position in the region might be supplanted by other external powers. The reality of the September 11 terrorist attacks caused Russia to re-evaluate its own policies and consider opportunities for exploiting new U.S. views on terrorism.

In the immediate aftermath of September 11, President Putin was the first world leader to place a telephone call to President Bush. In doing this, Putin ignored the objections of many Kremlin advisors and cemented his relationship, and personal bond, with Bush. Putin's actions in this case symbolize his policy of support for, and integration with, the West and in particular the United States. In spite of opposition from inside his own government, he made a decision to show Russia's support immediately, without waiting to build a consensus in his own government.

In the weeks that followed September 11, as it became apparent that America would court the Central Asian states for access to military facilities, rhetoric heated up in Russia as to what Russia's policy should be. In spite of President Putin's support for the United States, many of his closest advisors voiced strong concerns that America might exploit the new war on terrorism to gain a foothold in territories that had, until just 10 years before, been part of the Soviet Union. On September 18, 2001, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld announced that the United States would seek approval from several states in Central Asia and support from Russia to deploy military assets in the region to support the war on terrorism. Rumsfeld's statement seemed to imply that operations planned for Afghanistan might be launched from bases in nearby Central Asia. Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov responded by saying there was no basis for U.S. claims to a requirement for access to military bases in Central Asia.⁸ Several other key government officials also issued statements denouncing U.S. initiatives in the region. Shortly thereafter, to Ivanov's apparent surprise and perhaps consternation, Putin held a press conference to declare Russian support for the U.S. request.⁹

During his remarks at Harvard's Kennedy School in February 2002, Russian Duma Deputy Grigory Yavlinsky told an anecdote about Putin's decision to side with the United States in the war on terrorism. According to Yavlinsky, out of 21 people present in a September 24 advisory meeting Putin had called, only two voted to support the United States. One person voted to support the Taliban, and 18 said Russia should remain neutral. Shortly after the meeting, Putin announced "unconditional and immediate" support for the United States, including access to military facilities in the CIS.¹⁰ All of these statements sent confusing signals to the governments of Central Asian states. Yet despite his decision, Putin continues to oper-

ate in a political atmosphere that has not been particularly positive about cooperation with the West in general, and the United States in particular. In Russia, some wrongly believe the United States wants to see Russia fail in its foreign policy and security objectives so that it can “clean up” in the aftermath to its own advantage.

Russia’s Interests in Central Asia

As Lena Johnson, Senior Research Fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs and noted regional scholar, has argued:

Russia’s interests in Central Asia since the break-up of the Soviet Union are mainly related to strategic and security concerns. The strategic interests are two-fold: first to integrate Central Asian states in the CIS sphere and make them into close allies of Russia; and, second, to deny external powers strategic access to Central Asia.¹¹

First and foremost, Russia regards Central Asia as a buffer zone of strategic importance to its national defense. By the end of the 1990s, events in the region had increased fears about Islamic extremism and terrorism. This atmosphere gave Putin a convenient platform from which to suggest closer cooperation in the area of military security, as well as a renewed effort to reorient the Central Asian states toward Russia. The events of September 11 changed this dynamic. Early Russian opposition to the stationing of American military forces close to its borders for operations in Afghanistan did not play well in the Central Asian states. However, as Russia changed its position and received credit for a new cooperative policy in its dealings with the United States, Central Asian attitudes changed as well. Russia’s interest in the fall of the Taliban regime, and in expanding economic ties with the United States, overcame concerns about Central Asian states accepting American military bases in the region.

To allay Russian concerns, American military and civilian officials stressed the short-term nature of the American military presence in Central Asia and emphasized that troops would be withdrawn once military operations were over. However, as was sharply articulated in the press by anti-American hard liners such as General Colonel Leonid Ivashov,¹² Russia was well aware of the probability that America might try to exploit the opportunities created by the war on terrorism and remain in the region long after meeting announced military objectives.

Russia had to balance this concern against its fears that the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia could evoke increased unrest in the region and cause instability that could threaten Russia directly. Many

Russians believe that their greatest security risks are associated with the country's southern flank. Related to this is the concern that Chechen separatists are being funded by the same terrorist organizations at war with the United States. Osama Bin Laden did nothing to allay this fear when he pronounced that no country that supported and aided America in their war would be safe.¹³ In the wake of the horrific hostage siege at Moscow's "Nord Ost" theater during the week of October 22, 2002, Putin referred to Bin Laden's statement and concluded that there was a direct link between his decision to support America and the attack at the theater (by then attributed to Chechen terrorists).¹⁴

President Putin quickly became adept at interpreting the new American National Security Strategy in ways that supported Russian goals and objectives in its own "war on terrorism" in Chechnya. After the United States released its new National Security Strategy in October 2002,¹⁵ Putin hailed it as a landmark document for its sharp focus on the threat of terrorism, not only to the United States, but also to the world. By December, Putin gave indications he would revise Russia's National Security Doctrine along similar lines.¹⁶ Specifically, the aim was to identify terrorism more sharply as the primary threat to Russian interests. Since then, despite some acute frustration in his attempts to wield the ax of military reform against an intransigent General Staff, Putin and his Defense Minister, Sergei Ivanov, have achieved some progress in refocusing military doctrine. Recently, specific reforms have been aimed at further trimming the army's forces and implementing plans to move away from conscripts as the primary source of manpower toward an all-volunteer force similar to what is the norm in most Western countries. These positive steps might not have been possible absent the forward looking security environment that exists in the wake of September 11.

The American Point of View

The United States needs access to Central Asian infrastructure in order to more effectively and efficiently fight the Global War on Terrorism. In the immediate aftermath of the September 11 attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, America focused on striking al Qaeda at the heart of its operations in Afghanistan. Sustained support for such a military campaign required logistics bases in Central Asia and almost immediately, the United States began to work to make arrangements in the region. According to Eugene Rumer, senior fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, "After 10 years of working to maintain its

distance from Central Asia, the United States has landed squarely in the middle of it.”¹⁷

Initially, the United States secured an airbase in Uzbekistan and the right to use a similar facility in Kyrgyzstan. Although Kazakhstan initially turned down a U.S. request for an airbase in that country, subsequent arrangements allowed for such use if needed. Kazakhstan did grant the U.S. over-flight and emergency landing rights, and also received support for humanitarian efforts from Turkmenistan. In return for these concessions, the U.S. budget for assistance to the five Central Asian states has more than doubled from fiscal year 2001—literally, from \$230 to \$595 million.¹⁸ In response to the perceived rising threat of radical Islam in Central Asia, the United States is emphasizing security assistance and engagement with regional governments. Rumer states:

Since September 11, the United States has emerged as the principal power in Central Asian affairs. With the troop presence in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, the defeat of the Taliban government in Afghanistan, and all signs pointing to a long-term U.S. military presence in the region, the United States has become Central Asia’s security manager.¹⁹

Even though human rights groups have charged that Central Asian states have stepped up repression since the September 11 terrorist attacks, U.S. officials remain convinced that a positive engagement strategy can succeed in encouraging regional governments to embrace gradual liberal democratization. In an article for *The Eurasianet* in November 2002, Dr. Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation cited an unnamed U.S. National Security Council official who claims that the Bush administration views the foreign policy challenge in Central Asia as a balancing act between internal reform, security, and energy: “The focus on security is overriding, but not exclusive.”²⁰

The upcoming years will prove critical to the United States as it further refines its policies with Central Asia. Meeting growing national security concerns must reflect a balanced view—not only for the United States but also for the Central Asian nations themselves.

Kyrgyzstan and Other Regional Deployments

When American forces were first deployed to Central Asia in October 2001, Washington stated they were there for a limited time and would be withdrawn once the mission was completed. The deployment was not welcomed by Russia, though President Putin chose not to oppose it. Since

then, in Russian eyes, the U.S. build-up in the region has been out of proportion with stated intentions. More recently, leading American representatives have stated publicly that the U.S. presence in Central Asia would not only be long-term, but might even expand.²¹

Given the deteriorating relations between the United States and Russia in the aftermath of U.S. military intervention in Iraq, the situation in Central Asia has the potential to become a destabilizing factor. Late in 2002, Russian aircraft redeployed to Kant Air Base in Kyrgyzstan, ostensibly to support the war on terrorism.²² Some observers, however, believed the return of Russian troops to Kyrgyzstan might be a sign that a new rivalry was developing between Moscow and Washington in Central Asia, with the ultimate aim of establishing political and economic control over the region. This symbolic Russian presence is apparently the vanguard of a force that might ultimately include more than 20 Russian aircraft and about 700 troops, thus becoming the most significant military deployment outside Russia's borders since the Soviet collapse. Russian aircraft will form the core of the air unit.²³ According to *RIA Novostii*, the official Russian news agency, Russia plans to deploy five SU-25 attack jets, five SU-27 fighters, two AN-26 transports, two IL-76 transports, five IL-39 training jets, and two MI-8 helicopters.

During a brief stopover in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital, on December 4, 2002, President Putin endorsed the recent Russian deployment of fighter jets, bombers and other aircraft in Kyrgyzstan.²⁴ Speaking to journalists, Putin said that Russia's new military presence was very important and brought "a new quality" to security arrangements in the region. Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev has urged Russia to become a "main strategic cornerstone of Central Asia."²⁵ At the same time, officials also signed a defense protocol called the Bishkek Declaration, pledging closer security and economic ties between the two countries. While some believe the move may be designed to reassert Russia's military influence in a region where the United States now has its own semi-permanent military presence, Putin reassured the press that the agreement is not directed against any third country. Both presidents emphasized that the new relationship is multi-faceted, including a deal to write off some \$40 million of Kyrgyz debt to Moscow. Along with Putin, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov also visited Kyrgyzstan to inspect the new facilities. He announced that the Russian task force would provide air support for a contingent of ground forces. Known as a rapid reaction force, this group could eventually total more than 5,000 troops from Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajiki-

stan, as members of an alliance of former Soviet republics known as the Collective Security Treaty Organization.²⁶

The Russian deployment to Kant Air Base now means that Kyrgyzstan is host to two foreign air bases, the other being the U.S. facility at Manas, a Bishkek suburb. The U.S. base, which was established in the aftermath of September 11, is designed to provide air support for regional operations by the anti-terrorism coalition in Afghanistan. Some 2,000 American personnel now occupy Manas, and up to 5,000 coalition soldiers (including the original 2,000 U.S. troops) are expected to be based there eventually.²⁷ Although this force may help Kyrgyz authorities deal with terrorist threats, coalition troops are unlikely to back the government in disputes with political opposition forces, without additional security protocols. On one hand, the security deal between Moscow and Bishkek could indicate that the United States has failed to provide sufficient commitment to the Akaev administration in terms of security needs and domestic political problems. Therefore, Akaev is now turning to Russian backing in military, political and financial spheres. On the other hand, the new arrangements with Russia may be the harbinger of re-emerging Russian interests in a sphere of influence and a desire for enhanced credibility.

Russia and Kyrgyzstan have long maintained close political and military ties. Akaev has tended to support the Kremlin's policies in the region; in response, Moscow has backed Akaev's regime and warned against interference in Kyrgyz internal affairs. However, Moscow has been careful to deny that the Russian deployment in Kyrgyzstan is related in any way to the American presence. Almost tauntingly, *RIA Novostii* commented that nobody was going to push the Americans from Central Asia. The same *RIA Novostii* article added that since the United States has been unable to rid the region of terrorists despite more than two years of concerted effort, it is possible that Russian troops eventually could help defend the Americans in the event of some undefined "worst-case scenarios."²⁸

Following his trip to Kyrgyzstan, Putin traveled to China and India where speculation re-surfaced about the three countries "ganging up" to form a China-India-Russia "strategic triangle," in an effort to help balance the regional dominance of the United States. Despite the rumors, Russian sources concede that such a relationship would be unlikely since Russia, China, and India all are keen to strengthen good relations with Washington, and have backed the U.S. war on terrorism.²⁹ Both China and India have distanced themselves from the idea of a China-India-Russia strategic axis. However, foreign ministers of the three countries later met on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly session in New York for

informal talks, with the understanding that such meetings might be held on a regular basis. Although the “strategic triangle” concept still has some supporters in Moscow, Putin’s Asian tour came in the wake of improved relations with the United States. Therefore, pursuing a strategic alliance between Russia, India and China is unlikely to become Russia’s primary goal at this stage, and merely indicates that Moscow wants partners in both the East and West.

Yet, perhaps coincidentally, soon after Putin returned from his trip to China and India, Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov met with President Bush in Washington December 9, 2002. Media reports speculated that creation of a permanent U.S. military base in Tajikistan was among the main issues discussed at this meeting. Following an interview in December 2002 with Professor Aleksei Malashenko, of Moscow’s Institute for International Relations (MGIMO), journalist Zamira Eshanova claims Putin’s visit to Kyrgyzstan and Rakhmonov’s reception at the White House were at least indirectly connected. Malashenko apparently believes the process of the military reapportionment of Central Asia is under way, with the United States and Russia as the main players, and has said:

I think that these visits and these cross-negotiations and cross-actions in the direction of creating military bases in Central Asia do not mean that the Russian military presence in Central Asia is simply being replaced by an American one. It means that there are attempts to adjust or provide political stability from the outside.³⁰

Although the United States has given no signs that it may be preparing to court the government of Tajikistan in pursuit of any specific security related goals or objectives, there is reason to believe the Tajiks may be taken more seriously in Washington in the future.

Elsewhere in the region, Uzbekistan is already hosting some 3,000 American troops on its territory in support of operations in Afghanistan. Kazakhstan has offered an airport in the southern city of Shimkent to U.S.-led coalition forces. Thus, of the five Central Asian states, only Turkmenistan, which declared its permanent neutrality after independence, has remained apart from military developments related to the war on terrorism.

U.S. and Russian National Interests Coincide

As time passes, radical Islam has become an increasingly potent force in Central Asia. Ahmed Rashid, the Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and the *Daily Tele-*

graph, London, has written extensively on the region for the last 20 years and argues that the Hizb-ut-Tahrir al Islami (HT) or the Party of Islamic Liberation and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are both serious threats to the region. Followers of these movements derive inspiration from the Taliban and the extreme Wahhabi doctrine of Saudi Arabia, and were trained at militant madrassas in Pakistan. In his book *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia*, Rashid documents a September 2000 meeting to discuss future cooperation between al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden and representatives from the IMU, the HT, and Chechen separatists in Kabul, Afghanistan.³¹ The potential for increasing linkages between terrorist organizations makes such threats transnational and sets the stage for growing international cooperation.

In Russia, President Putin appears to be exploiting anti-terrorism sentiment to his advantage and has succeeded in linking Russia's war in Chechnya with America's war on terrorism. On November 11, 2002, at a post EU meeting press conference in Brussels, Putin unleashed an especially strong invective against a reporter from the Paris newspaper *Le Monde*. Responding to a question about the potential unintended consequences of using land mines in Chechnya and specifically whether this tactic was causing too many civilian casualties, Putin cited widespread aggression against Russia as far back as 1999 in Dagestan. Putin alleged this aggression stemmed from Islamic sources and was directed at Russia because these same forces would never be willing to coexist peacefully on Russia's southern flank. He went on to point out that France must surely feel the same dangers since it, too, was an ally of the United States in the war on terrorism.³²

Thus, despite 50 years of regional confrontation and tensions over the deployment of U.S. troops to Central Asia, the United States and Russia appear to be ready to cooperate in Central Asia in the war on terrorism. Neither side seems to be willing, or even able, to "go it alone." Each has much to gain from cooperating with the other, and each also stands to lose much if cooperation sours. Russian foreign policy under Putin has evolved over the duration of his presidency. Pragmatic and forceful, his ability to exploit opportunities for gain has steadily improved. Accordingly, Russia may be willing to tolerate, if not openly encourage, a long-term presence of U.S. security forces in Central Asia if it means the United States will assist Russia in dealing with the threat of terrorism. From the American perspective, the United States has an opportunity now to create a more positive relationship with Russia, with significant benefits for both sides. Russia's leadership wants integration with the United States, not only in

the war against terrorism, but also in areas such as trade and energy. Both sides have a unique chance to exploit the current situation to craft foreign policy that will overcome old antagonisms and distrust.

The Future

Both Russia and the United States have recognized the importance of Central Asia. Their current competition for regional influence has been compared to the historical contest of Russia and Britain, referred to by Peter Hopkirk and others as “The Great Game.”³³ In the current context, there is compelling evidence that the security of Central Asia has similarly high stakes for all concerned. One way to think about this is from the perspective of alternative futures. Peter Schwartz, in his research on developing a scenario planning model for business, begins with a set of visions that attempt to look 10 years into the future.³⁴ To frame such possibilities, it is useful to begin with two contrasting alternative futures, from among the many that are conceivable. In adapting scenario planning to international relations, especially in the context of regional security cooperation in Central Asia, alternative futures in the U.S.-Russian relationship might resemble one of the following “tales.”³⁵ Although hypothetical, it is not difficult to imagine the plausibility of each. These narratives highlight the interconnectedness and interdependence of the participants in a regional relationship that could be described as a new great game. As each unfolds, it is useful to consider what it might take to make them real.

A Tale of Two Possible Future Worlds

First, the nightmare scenario: The year is 2011 and the United States has been at war against terrorism since September 11, 2001. Things have gone badly for the United States since it has emerged as the sole nation fighting the war. Russia has pulled out of the coalition and decided to go its own way. Mission creep has led to pursuing objectives beyond simply crushing terrorism as a threat, including nation-building throughout the Middle East and into Central and South Asia. The conflict has become global. After Russia split from the coalition and abandoned any further attempts at integration with the West, Russian military forces rallied in support of the Communist Party. This led to a more independent minded senior military leadership, less inclined to accept guidance from civilians in government. Russian military bases in Central Asia exist side by side with those of the United States, often with resultant skirmishes as each side seeks to defend its territory. Political regimes in Central Asian states generally have become even more repressive and authoritarian. The Rus-

sian economy is a shambles and corruption is deeply entrenched at every level. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is widespread throughout the region. Large stockpiles of dangerous weapons continue to disappear from controlled areas and show up in various theaters of war. In sum, the world is at war and Central Asia has become an exceptionally dangerous and highly unstable powder keg.

Next, an alternative, arm-in-arm scenario: The year is 2011 and the global war on terrorism has been over for several years. The United States and its coalition allies, including Russia and all the Central Asian states, were victorious. Terrorist organizations—state-sponsored and otherwise—have been beaten back into marginal threats that are easily tracked through the advent of highly developed regional security cooperation. Russia is fully integrated with the west. NATO has changed its name to the Euro-Atlantic Security Treaty Organization and Russia is a candidate for joining the alliance as a full partner. The Russian military, firmly under civilian control, is reforming along NATO-standard lines, leaner and more efficient. Central Asian military bases are jointly occupied by Russian, American and indigenous forces. Regional economies are stable and highly productive. The post war strategic environment has led to stability for oil pipelines and export of natural resources from Central Asian reserves. Membership in the World Trade Organization, debt restructuring, and debt forgiveness have given new strength to Russia's burgeoning market capitalism. Russian leadership and influence in Central Asia are welcomed and encouraged by the United States. Corruption and proliferation of WMD are rare, as most of the reasons for black markets have been eliminated. In sum, the world is at peace and Central Asia has become model region of stability with U.S. and Russian forces cooperating side-by-side.

Getting Back to the Future

Considering the respective national interests of Russia and the United States in Central Asia, and in view of strategic security objectives that have been established by both, it is possible to see a degree of convergence in comparing these two entirely hypothetical scenarios. Regional stability, from the perspective of Russia's national interests, depends on support for authoritarian political regimes committed to maintaining the status quo. The same regional stability so critical to Russia is also important for the national interests of the United States. In order to limit threats to its own security forces in the region, America needs Russian cooperation to prevent instability and its subsequent insecurities. Therefore, close cooperation between Russia and the United States in the war on terrorism

translates directly to support for current political regimes in Central Asia that seek to restrict sources of instability.

American and Russian national interests in Central Asia coincide more often than they do not. Absent close cooperation with Russia and the Central Asian states, the United States would be forced to operate at significant disadvantages in Afghanistan. Similarly, if Russia has to conduct operations against terrorists in Chechnya without cutting off support for terrorists from Central Asia, the disadvantages are legion. Even after the war on terrorism is over, the peace that follows will be influenced for all concerned by the lines of cooperation established during the war. Close cooperation in wartime will doubtless lead to closer ties in peace. These partnerships could reap benefits in areas beyond security cooperation. Although scenario planning helps to imagine the possibilities in hypothetical terms, current events also are instructive.

Putin's Real World

President Putin's initiative to make Russia's foreign policy more pro-Western has not been well received by his country's political and military elite. To some, the absence of widespread support among these groups has led to speculation about Putin's credibility, sincerity, commitment to democratization and his ability to bring his nation along with him. Opinions have been divided. The most important question is whether Putin's initiative really represents a true change in Russian foreign policy or just a political experiment. According to Dmitri Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Center,³⁶ Russia's decision to support the United States in the war on terrorism was based on fundamental Russian interests. It is, however, still not clear whether other key elements of the Russian government share the President's view of precisely what those interests are.

The changes in Russia's foreign policy following September 11 are often interpreted as a personal achievement for President Putin, despite Russian public opinion.³⁷ His policy of supporting the United States in the fight against terrorism and Russia's active participation in the antiterrorist coalition, as well as the warming of Russia's relations with America and NATO, appears outwardly to be an extraordinary act of political courage. However, some political and social analysts³⁸ have observed that deeply rooted anti-Americanism (a legacy of the Cold War), and the sometimes open hostility toward the United States as a world leader, are stronger than feelings of sympathy for the victims of the terrorist acts of September 11. A sense that the Russian and American peoples are in some way united in suffering from international terrorism is also lacking.

The risks associated with those political factors driving Russian behavior in the war on terrorism center on President Putin's ability to deliver on what he promises. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, it cannot be assumed that senior military leadership simply will fall in line behind Putin's assurances to the United States about close cooperation in the war on terrorism. Retired General Leonid Ivashov, for one, is well known for his eagerness to warn Russian leaders of the perils of moving too close to the United States. Following a press conference in December 2000 at which President Putin announced that military cooperation with NATO would resume, General Ivashov emphasized the risks of closer cooperation.³⁹ Not yet retired at that time, Ivashov called attention to aspects of the president's policy that were of great concern to the senior officers of Russia's armed forces. Nor is this example isolated; others in the government have spoken out in similar fashion. Despite some recently positive trends, it is not yet clear whether President Putin's initiatives in support of broad integration with the United States ultimately will succeed.

Conclusion

Most Russians have accepted that they cannot dictate security terms to Central Asian states simply by fiat. The Russian government is not financially capable of providing the region with the same measure of support it can hope to garner from the United States. In view of Russian fears that without hard line governments in Central Asia, the ground might be fertile for rising Islamic fundamentalism, it is clearly in Russia's interests to support security solutions that favor the status quo, enhancing long-term stability. Toward this end, there are, and will continue to be, opportunities for Russia to supplement American initiatives in the region.

For their part, Central Asian governments remain suspicious of Russian intentions and motives. Most fear that any move to shore up relations with Russia alone might result in a loss of independence. Instead, these governments see the advantages of close ties with both Russia and the United States. If security cooperation with America is tolerated by Russia, then this is indeed the better path. Central Asia needs stability, for with stability and regional security will come improved financial and economic outlooks. Russian interests are similar, but are complicated by the war in Chechnya.

Perhaps Putin sees U.S. involvement in an even more pragmatic way than might have been suspected in the aftermath of September 11. It may be that Putin believes a U.S. presence in Central Asia will provide the necessary stability in the region, thus paving the way for increased domestic

security for Russia at American expense. If this is the case, then it appears likely that Russia will tolerate U.S. military cooperation in Central Asia as long as it remains politically manageable. Russia's position could be strengthened by further deployments, such as the one to Kyrgyzstan, calling attention to Russian capabilities. Putin's 2000 presidential campaign emphasized his commitment to end the war in Chechnya. Now that he has linked international terrorism to this issue, it is even more important that he bring Russia's security policies in line with its foreign policy.

Finally, it is certainly in the best interests of the Central Asian states to embrace security cooperation with Russia and the United States to the extent that it supports (or, in some cases, even guarantees) their own political stability and national security. Valuable resources in the region are much more likely to be unlocked and converted into positive means for national wealth if there is a stable environment that encourages commercial interests. Oil extraction and marketing need strong state security guarantees in order to be safe from terrorist attacks. Even those states with limited natural resources have strategic assets, such as airfields or other defense related infrastructure, which could be useful to both Russia and the United States during the upcoming months or years in what increasingly appears to be a protracted war on terrorism. Airports may be the only marketable resource available in Kyrgyzstan, but these are important assets, on which all players seem willing to capitalize. Recent events show that Central Asia may be witnessing a new great game, with its fate in this latest round being decided not only by foreign interests, but also by its own policies. Regional security cooperation in Central Asia could be the key to success for all sides with prudently managed, security cooperation delivering enormous benefits to Russia, the United States and the Central Asian states themselves. Squandered, the negative implications are disproportionately worse. Now, more than ever, the next moves must be carefully considered. Even as one plays chess, strategic players think many moves ahead. Russians are traditionally superb at this game, and the United States should be aware of all the options and potential impacts before entering into agreements or implementing policies that might have far reaching consequences.

Notes

¹ White House press release, November 20, 2002.

² Igor Ivanov, *Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation*, (Moscow: Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, June 28, 2000).

³ Victor Litovkin, *Security is Best Achieved Through Coalition: Russia's New Military Doctrine Highlights Community of Goals with the World* (Moscow: RIA Novosti, October 2, 2003), <www.cdi.org/russia/276-6.cfm>.

⁴ Dale R. Herspring, *Putin's Russia: Past Imperfect, Future Uncertain* (Oxford, UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2002), 231.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, *The Changing Security Policy Challenges in Central Asia: The New International Context* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 96.

⁷ Interview with Nazarbayev in the Russian language newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, January 16, 1997.

⁸ "Bush was asked about comments made by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov that there is 'no basis,' as he put it, for Central Asian states bordering Afghanistan to offer their territory to the U.S. or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to launch strikes against Afghanistan," <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/172-pr.html#5>>, Washington, September 20, 2001 (RFE/RL) "Russia: Support For U.S. May Be Self-Serving."

⁹ "In an abrupt change of policy and heart, Russia's President Vladimir V. Putin said this week that the United States could use Russian airspace to carry out strikes against Afghanistan. Putin, who until then had been eager to put more and more distance between himself and Washington, also withdrew his objections to a U.S. military presence in the former Soviet republics Uzbekistan and Tajikistan," <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/173-pr.html#7>>, *Baltimore Sun*, September 27, 2001 "In Russia, doubts, skepticism" (quoting from recent Russian press: *Novaya Gazeta*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Izvestiya*, *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Kommersant*).

¹⁰ Grigory Yavlinsky, Russian State Duma Member (Yabloko Party), "Russia and the United States: New Challenges, New Strategies," Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (BCSIA), John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, February 6, 2002.

¹¹ Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, *Central Asian Security: The New International Context* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution Press, 2001), 97-101.

¹² General Colonel Leonid Ivashov, recently retired from his post at the helm of International Military Cooperation for the Russian Ministry of Defense, gave an interview to Vladimir Mukhin, a journalist with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, appearing in *The Russia Journal* (December 17, 2001). In the interview, Ivashov said he thinks there is a lot wrong with President Putin's new policy of moving Russia toward increased cooperation with the United States. Ivashov apparently believes Russia would be well served by maintaining a healthy distance from all things western.

¹³ In an audiotape released to Arabic television station Al Jazeera on November 11, 2002, Osama Bin Laden issued his first statement in many months. In a voice that intelligence analysts agree is probably authentic, Bin Laden indicts America for unjust war against Islam and specifically threatens to engulf in its vengeance any other nation that allies itself with the United States.

¹⁴ Gregory Feifer, "Russia: Moscow's Vow to Fight Terrorism Criticized Amid Theater-Raid Fallout," RLE/RL, Moscow, Russia, October 30, 2002, <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/229-2.cfm>>. Using rhetoric strikingly similar to that of U.S. President George W. Bush after September 11, 2001, Putin said Russia would take the initiative in combating threats to its national security. "Russia will respond with measures appropriate to the threats wherever there are terrorists, organizations of these criminals, or their ideological or financial sponsors."

¹⁵ National Security Strategy of the United States of America, The White House, October 2002.

¹⁶ Interfax News Agency, Moscow, Russia, January 30, 2003, <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/242-3.cfm>>. According to the First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council's Defense and Security Committee, Colonel General (ret) Valeriy Manilov, "A new edition of the Russian national security concept will take into consideration every threat the international community has encountered."

¹⁷ Eugene B. Rumer, "Flashman's Revenge: Central Asia after September 11," Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum, no. 195, December 2002.

¹⁸ Ariel Cohen, "US Officials Relying on Engagement Strategy to Promote Change in Central Asia," *Eurasianet*, November 14, 2002.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Hooman Peimani, "Military Buildup Ends US-Russian Honeymoon," *Asia Times*, August 28, 2002, and "US Presence in Central Asia Antagonizes Russia," published in the Jamestown Foundation's *CDI Russia Weekly*, Issue no. 228, Item no.11, October 23, 2002. Dr. Hooman Peimani works as an independent consultant with international organizations in Geneva and does research in International Relations. Peimani attributes the claim that U.S. military presence in Central Asia would not only likely be long-term, but might also be growing, to General Tommy Franks in his meetings with senior government officials in many Central Asian states during negotiations in the run-up to operations in Afghanistan.

²² On December 2, 2002, two Russian SU-25 attack jets and two IL-76 military transport planes (along with 70 troops to establish air traffic control systems and provide security) arrived from neighboring Tajikistan and landed at a military airfield in Kant, about 20 kilometers east of Bishkek. Two days later, three SU-27 fighter jets arrived from the Lipetsk base in Central Russia. According to Sergei Blagov, writing for the *Asian Times* on December 5, 2002, Russian pilots had dubbed one specific aircraft the "presidential plane" because Putin had used it to fly over Chechnya in an unprecedented public relations exercise two years before (supporting the conclusion that these aircraft were front line equipment in good working order). According to Blagov, official government statements revealed that the three SU-27 fighter jets were scheduled to return to Lipetsk soon, with the two SU-25s to remain in Kyrgyzstan indefinitely.

²³ (AFP) "Russia's Putin in Kyrgyzstan to boost waning influence in Central Asia," December 5, 2002, <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/234-3.cfm>>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Sanobar Shermatova, "Russia's Motives in Kyrgyzstan: Russia's intent in building an air base in Kyrgyzstan is clearly to counterbalance U.S. forces stationed in that region," *Moscow News*, December 25-31, 2002, <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/237-13.cfm>>.

²⁶ Valeriy Volkov and Nikolai Khorunzhi, "Sharing Central Asia With America: Russia Maintains its Presence in Central Asia," *Izvestia*, December 5, 2002 (from WPS Monitoring Agency, <www.wps.ru/e_index.html>).

²⁷ Zamira Eshanova, "Central Asia: Diplomatic Visits Highlight U.S.-Russian Cooperation," (RFE/RL) JRL, December 4, 2002, no. 18, <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/6585.cfm>>. Note: This figure is widely disputed but seems to have the strength of popular credibility in press reports. Because of this, it is suspected that the data may represent "circular reporting" and is thus misleading.

²⁸ Sergei Blagov, "U.S. and Russia Marching On Central Asia," article published in the *Asia Times*, December 5, 2002, quotes *RIA Novostii* sources, December 6, 2002. <<http://www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/6591-11.cfm>>.

²⁹ Sergei Rogov, Director of the Russian Academy of Sciences Institute of Canada and U.S.A. Studies in Moscow, speaking at the Center for Naval Analyses in Washington, DC, September 25, 2002.

³⁰ Zamira Eshanova.

³¹ Ahmen Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

³² According to James Schumaker, Special Assistant to U.S. Ambassador Sandy Vershbow, in a newsletter from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow November 19, 2002: Working up his anger to a still higher level, all directed at the same hapless French reporter whose bad luck seemed to catch the Russian President in the mood for a good fight, Putin challenged the fellow to come to Moscow and "be circumcised in such a way as to be irrevocably identified with this Muslim horde."

³³ Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia* (Kodansha International, Reprint edition, April 1994).

³⁴ Peter Schwartz, "Appendix: Steps to Developing Scenarios," *Art of the Long View* (Doubleday, 1996), 241-248, and Kees van der Heijden, "Dealing With Uncertainty," "Scenario Development," *Scenarios: The Art of the Strategic Conversation*, John Wiley (1996), 83-106, 183-237.

³⁵ Robert Brannon, *U.S.-Russian Relations in the War on Terrorism*, (under commitment for publication by the Naval War College Review, Newport RI, 2004). Adapted to illustrate the application of scenario planning to regional security in Central Asia.

³⁶ Alexander Mineev, Opinion Editorial, Russian language newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*, January 21, 2002.

³⁷ William Zimmerman, *The Russian People and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), 89-102. Actual figures, cited on page 91 of Zimmerman's book, reveal that 62 percent of elites and 68 percent of the mass population see the United States as a threat to Russian security.

³⁸ Michael Kochkin, "Russia and the United States Post September 11: What do the Russians Think?" Jamestown Foundation, *Russia and Eurasia Review* 1, Issue 11 (November 5, 2002). Mr. Kochkin works for the non-governmental organization "Eurocontact" in Volgograd and is occasionally published in English language by *CDI Russia Weekly* (in this case, 230, no. 12).

³⁹ Annual briefing for foreign military attaches, December 2000, author's personal notes, American Embassy, Moscow, Russia.