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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter studies the evolution of the foreign policies of Central Asia's states, focusing on Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

### MAIN ARGUMENT:

The newly independent states of Central Asia are institutionally weak and surrounded by larger regional powers. Foreign policies in the region generally aim to maintain balance among great powers and to ensure regime security. Russian and Chinese influence is strong and supportive of the latter, but the quest for balance spurs the development of ties to the U.S. and other powers. Pressure for democratization accompanies these relations with the West, which need to be treated with care by U.S. policymakers.

### POLICY IMPLICATIONS:

- Promoting security, reliable supplies of energy, and good governance are the primary U.S. interests in the region. Though widely viewed as mutually contradictory, these objectives are only achievable in the long term if pursued in concert.
- Informal politics is a key element in the domestic and foreign policies of Central Asian states. Strengthening formal institutions is, therefore, a compelling priority for the U.S., as is seeking a better understanding of informal power structures.
- The "color revolutions," though beneficial to the countries that underwent them, have had negative consequences both for U.S. interests in Central Asia and for broader democratic reform. By injecting an ideological element into regional politics, these revolutions have increased Russian and Chinese influence and weakened the U.S. position. Uzbekistan stands out as the primary example.
- Strategic thinking and long-term policies toward the region that inspire confidence and predictability would restore U.S. influence. Calibrating the democracy promotion agenda to the strategic realities of the region would help state-building efforts and dialogue on a wide range of issues.

## Finding Balance: The Foreign Policies of Central Asia's States

*Svante E. Cornell*

Upon independence in 1991, the five states of post-Soviet Central Asia were confronted with the entire battery of institution-building tasks normally associated with post-colonial environments. These new states found themselves in a much more challenging geopolitical position than most post-colonial states. In addition to being new and institutionally weak, the Central Asian states are relatively small and are surrounded by Eurasia's most powerful countries. Central Asian governments have responded to this environment by seeking to strengthen their sovereignty through balancing the interests of external powers. At the same time these governments have worked to safeguard stability by controlling the pace of internal political change.

State-building processes initially led Central Asia's rulers to look inward. Over time increasingly consolidated statehood gradually enabled these states to pursue more independent foreign policies. Against the backdrop of this broader regional trend, however, diverging domestic political and economic realities have strongly affected the choices these rulers have made for their countries' external relations. The contrasting evolutions of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the region's two most important states, are particularly noteworthy in this context. Foreign policies of the two countries have developed in nearly opposite directions, mirroring differences in their domestic development.

In the mid-1990s Uzbekistan sought to launch itself into the role of a regional power.<sup>1</sup> Economic stability undergirded Tashkent's ambitions to play an independent role both by balancing Russian influence with ties to the United States and by exerting influence over smaller neighbors. This strategy intensified following September 11, 2001 when Uzbekistan seemed to achieve its aim of forging a strategic partnership with the United States. By 2005, however, Tashkent had abruptly cut ties to Washington, expelled the U.S. military base from its territory, and re-embraced Moscow's leading role in Eurasian security affairs.<sup>2</sup> This u-turn betrayed a reactive approach, which stemmed from a growing sense of domestic insecurity.

In contrast, Kazakhstan was initially concerned with its large Russian minority and 2,000-mile border with Russia. Rapid economic liberalization accelerated the short-term economic difficulties generated by the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> The Kazakh leadership mostly kept a low profile in international issues and refrained from challenging Russia. By the mid-2000s, however, the situation had changed. The infrastructure associated with the earlier economic reforms led to an oil boom. Growing domestic stability and economic growth enabled Kazakhstan to begin to formulate a distinctively independent foreign policy based on achieving balance in relations with the great powers.

Nevertheless, two main concerns apparently guide both countries' foreign policies as well as those of the other states in the region. One concern is the strength of their newly won independence as evidenced by their attempt to maximize freedom of maneuver by broadening the scope of their foreign relations. A second is the maintenance of internal stability and regime security (concepts the ruling elites understand as synonymous), as evidenced by efforts to prevent the rise of various domestic and transnational opponents—including legitimate opposition forces, criminal groups, and Islamic radicals.

These considerations pose a dilemma for the rulers of Central Asia. Foreign policies oriented toward Russia and China would increase regime security for these rulers but at the cost of an independent foreign policy. Happy to support the internal stability of the governments of Central Asia, Moscow and Beijing care little about the domestic policies of the states in this region. Russia and China are, however, also working more closely together

<sup>1</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 1 (January/February 1996): 80–92.

<sup>2</sup> John C. K. Daly, Kurt H. Meppen, Vladimir Socor, and S. Frederick Starr, *Anatomy of a Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001–2005*, Silk Road Paper, February 2006 (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Sally Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite* (London: IB Tauris, 2005), 21–26; and Richard Pomfret, *The Central Asian Economies Since Independence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 40–60.

to minimize the influence of the West—and thus would only support states in the region that toe this line. A Western orientation, on the other hand, would allow the regional governments to broaden the scope of their foreign relations and avoid total dependence on their larger neighbors—but at the cost of regime security. Improving relations with the West, and especially with the United States, would entail exposing the Central Asian states to the Western democracy promotion agenda. Rulers in the region increasingly understand this agenda as a threat to their continued hold on power.

This Central Asian dilemma in turn translates into a complex environment for the formulation of U.S. policies toward the region. U.S. interests fall into three main categories: security and strategic access, the westward export of the Caspian region's energy resources, and internal reform in the mainly authoritarian countries of the region. The United States faces the task of building a coherent policy that makes these interests compatible rather than contradictory.

This chapter begins by describing the state structures and political systems of Central Asia in order to provide an understanding of the political realities influencing foreign policy. Analysis of the external environment of the region, with particular attention given to the influence of the western democracy agenda, then follows. The chapter ends by detailing the interaction of foreign and domestic policies in the region and concludes by drawing policy implications for the United States.

## State Structure and Political Systems

The domestic determinants of foreign policy in Central Asia are tightly linked to the recent nature of statehood in the region, with Central Asian states having only appeared as independent entities on the world map in 1991. The most salient characteristic of the region's states is their institutional weakness, which stems from the immense economic and social problems that accompanied the transition from Soviet rule. Worth remembering is that no state, emirate, or principality had ever existed with the name, or even roughly the same borders, of the current five post-Soviet Central Asian states.

### *The Challenge of Independence*

The territorial entities that now constitute the states of Central Asia were created somewhat arbitrarily by the Soviet central government in the 1920s and 1930s. The borders often ignored ethnic, linguistic, economic, topographic, and geographic realities. All states of the region are multi-

ethnic; some have substantial concentrated groups of ethnic minorities. Soviet borders made little sense, especially in the Fergana Valley, historically a single economic and cultural unit dominated by the Uzbeks. Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan divide the area, but each country is seasonally cut off from its valley territory. This division had negligible effects during the Soviet period, when administrative borders did not impede communications or transportation. Since independence, however, borders have acquired real importance. With the emergence of militant Islamist movements in the late 1990s, many borders were closed and even mined, most extensively by Uzbekistan. The networks of roads, railroads, and power and gas distribution centers had been laid out with little heed to borders, however, interlinking the regional states in ways that limited their economic sovereignty. Individual governments perceived this cross-border network as a threat to their independent development and each built separate infrastructure networks entirely within its own national border. Though reducing dependence on each others' consent or cooperation, the creation of these national networks diverted the use of scarce resources.

In economic terms, the Soviet Union's command economy and cotton monoculture forced several regional states to import foodstuffs, making them ill-prepared for integration into the world economy. That these states are far from world markets adds a "distance tariff" to the region.<sup>4</sup> These economic challenges have been further exacerbated by the ongoing unrest in Afghanistan and the region's unnatural economic dependence on Russia.

Central Asia does have rich hydrocarbon and water resources, but the unequal distribution is a major problem. Almost all hydrocarbons are located in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, and almost all water originates from sources in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Soviet times, during the hot summers the eastern states delivered water to the farmlands downstream, emptying reservoirs that could otherwise have been used for electricity generation. The oil and gas producers to the west in return delivered energy to their eastern neighbors in the cold winters at nominal cost. After independence, however, oil and gas producers often succumbed to the temptation of charging for energy while refusing to pay for water—thereby generating substantial tension.

These factors, combined with a lack of historical legitimacy, induced an acute sense of vulnerability on the part of the region's leaders. Central Asian states were generally against the dissolution of the Soviet Union for good reason. Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev, for one, frantically

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<sup>4</sup> S. Frederick Starr, "The War against Terrorism and U.S. Bilateral Relations with the Nations of Central Asia," testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the Subcommittee on Central Asia and the South Caucasus, Washington, D.C., December 13, 2001.

tried to achieve a reformed union.<sup>5</sup> Central Asia's rulers at first faced independence with a mix of reluctance, anticipation, and concern for the viability of their states.

### *Evolution of Political Systems*

The above conditions presented significant challenges to the development of both the functioning market economies and the democratic rule of law. The Central Asian states were in an unenviable position to conform to the so-called transition paradigm that strongly influenced Western understanding of, and policies toward, countries “in transition” in the 1990s. The paradigm's central assumption—that “any country moving away from dictatorial rule can be considered a country in transition toward democracy”—may have been accurate in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>6</sup> In Central Asia, however, the socialist state system was replaced not by democratic governance but by other forms of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian government. Western observers failed to “give significant attention to the challenge of a society trying to democratize while it is grappling with the reality of building a state from scratch or coping with an existent but largely nonfunctional state.”<sup>7</sup>

In place of the transition paradigm, a new literature in political science is now emerging to understand the variety of new regime types, none of which neatly fit standard ideals of dictatorship or democracy.<sup>8</sup> Central Asian states offer political scientists a virtual laboratory for examining different semi-authoritarian forms of government. These states share a commitment to political reform that is tenuous at best. Only in Tajikistan did competition of any significant magnitude take place following a (short-lived) period of liberalization in 1990–91; this experiment ended, however, in civil war and the eventual restoration of authoritarian rule.<sup>9</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, less-extensive leadership changes occurred—first in the late Soviet era and again following riots in March 2005—with most of the ruling elite surviving the changes at the top. In Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan Communist Party first secretaries stayed securely at the helm

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<sup>5</sup> H. Plater-Zyberk, *Kazakhstan: Security & Defence Challenges* (Camberley: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom Conflict Studies Research Centre, September 2002), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Quote taken from Thomas Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 1 (2002): 8.

<sup>7</sup> Carothers, “The End of the Transition Paradigm,” 8–9.

<sup>8</sup> Larry Diamond, “Thinking about Hybrid Regimes,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21–35.

<sup>9</sup> Sergey Gretskey, “Civil War in Tajikistan: Causes, Development and Prospects for Peace,” in *Central Asia: Conflict, Revolution, and Change*, ed. Roald Sagdeev and Susan Eisenhower (Washington, D.C.: Center for Political and Strategic Studies, 1995).

of their respective republics long after independence. With the 2006 death of Turkmenistan's president Saparmurad Niyazov, Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov are the sole Soviet-era leaders to remain in their posts. Though much of the older political elite is still in place, younger and more progressive forces have gradually taken up positions of influence across the region. This process is currently underway in Kazakhstan and has already occurred in Uzbekistan, although there has been a backlash in the last few years in the latter case.

A key—yet often overlooked—similarity among the Central Asian states is the salience of informal networks of power, which remain more important than formal institutions. All countries have what Frederick Starr calls “politics A” and “politics B”—the former referring to the overt, formalized political system, and the latter pointing to informal relations and factors not usually seen by the public.<sup>10</sup> Such informal networks and structures are relatively more important in developing or transitional countries with low levels of experience in independent politics, lesser cohesion in society, low acceptance of state authority, and weak governing institutions—exactly the situation in Central Asia. As one scholar has described, Central Asian politics are characterized by a “persistence of traditional societies with their pre-national patriotisms and the presence, under the umbrella of the nation-state, of lively subnational and regional realities.” These subnational groups are often referred to as “clans.”<sup>11</sup> Given the variety of sub-state social identities, the term “solidarity groups” is more accurate.<sup>12</sup> Three different types of groups exist. One consists of the traditionally nomadic tribes such as the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, and Turkmen. A second includes networks that are regionally rather than network-based and that reflect traditional pre-Soviet power centers. The third category bases its power on control over economic resources, such as cotton, oil, or other industries; these groups overlap with the tribal and regional networks.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Russia's oligarchs, who emerged primarily following the Soviet collapse, Central Asia's networks were firmly grounded before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, or even earlier.

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<sup>10</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, Silk Road Paper, June 2006 (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006), 10–12.

<sup>11</sup> Donald S. Carlisle, “Geopolitics and Ethnic Problems of Uzbekistan and Its Neighbours,” in *Muslim Eurasia: Conflicting Legacies*, ed. Yaacov Ro'i (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 73; Kathleen Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics* 56, no. 2 (2004): 224–61; Edward Schatz, *Modern Clan Politics: The Power Of “Blood” In Kazakhstan and Beyond* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); and Adrienne Lynn Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, “Uzbekistan's State-building Fatigue,” *Washington Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (Summer 2006): 127–40.

<sup>13</sup> Starr, *Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia*, 7–8.

Presiding over the formal institutions of the state and faced with few checks and balances, Central Asia's authoritarian rulers appear in control. These leaders do not, however, have similar sway over the tribal, regional, or economy-based power brokers who exert a substantial pressure upon policymaking in the country. This is particularly true in the case of foreign economic relations—as opposition to market reforms often comes from those controlling important economic sectors. Numerous elite groups also maintain contacts in Russia, which influences their views on foreign policy and provides Moscow with a lobby within Central Asian countries that is separate from the official, institutionalized foreign policymaking process. The influence of regional and economic elites also contributes to the growing fusion of political and economic power characteristic of many post-Soviet states.

Each Central Asian state grapples with problems of identity that reinforce these strong subnational solidarity groups. Identification with a nation-state remains relatively weak in Central Asia, further weakening central governmental authority and bolstering regional power-brokers. All governments have engaged in nation-building, digging into the past for historical precedent and legitimization of the existence of the nation and the rule of the government. Each government produced a nationalism designed to unify the population around leadership of the government.

These similarities in domestic political development have contributed to the gravitation of Central Asian states toward a range of semi-authoritarian to authoritarian systems, with differences between states being only a matter of degree and not nature. Economic development, however, has been more divergent, with Kazakhstan's success having been as remarkable as Uzbekistan's stagnation.

### *Kazakhstan: From Bicomunal Society under the Russian Shadow to Success Story*

In the early days of independence, Kazakhstan was one of the most fragile states of Central Asia. One regional expert has termed Kazakhstan “an accidental country, a nation that was carved out of a Soviet republic whose boundaries were never intended to be those of an independent state.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Kazakhstan was the last and most reluctant republic of the Soviet Union to embrace independence and the only Soviet republic whose titular population formed less than half of the republic's population.

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<sup>14</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, “Democratization and the Growth of Political Participation in Kazakhstan,” in *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 201.



Kazakhstan's leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, had been a leading advocate of saving—but reforming—the Soviet Union. After independence, Nazarbayev became one of the foremost champions of integration in the post-Soviet space. The main challenge facing the new country was demography—as Kazakhs only slightly outnumbered the Russian minority that dominated the five northern provinces of the country and the capital, Almaty.

Almaty had been one of the first trouble spots of the perestroika era. Riots erupted there in 1986 when Soviet authorities replaced long-time Kazakh leader Dinmukhamed Kunaev with an ethnic Russian. The move was a departure from standard Soviet practices—natives headed the bureaucracy in almost all other administrative units. The riots demonstrated the potential of ethnicity as a mobilizing factor in Kazakhstan. Political movements based on Russian and Kazakh nationalism emerged in the following years. Boris Yeltsin's suggestion that Kazakhstan's northern provinces be incorporated into Russia, as well as subsequent Russian steps to make the protection of ethnic Russians abroad state policy, further aggravated ethnic tensions.<sup>15</sup> The double threat of a bifurcated society and the Russian “shadow” forced Kazakhstan to walk a tightrope to ensure survival and sovereignty.

Internally, Kazakhstan suffered stronger controversies over the form of government than did most other regional states. Tensions between the parliament and the president exploded into the open in 1994, when the parliament overtly challenged the president's powers. Nazarbayev was opposed largely by Slavs from the north and Kazakhs from the west, who resented the dominance of the large eastern informal networks—known as “hordes” in the Kazakh context—that they saw Nazarbayev as representing. This risked leading Kazakhstan down the road of a constitutional and political crisis. Nevertheless, Nazarbayev disbanded parliament in 1995, a bold move that formed the decisive step in moving Kazakhstan toward a presidential republic. Similar to what was ongoing in most post-Soviet states at the time, this development increased political stability but did so at the cost of democratic development.

Political difficulties also affected economic policy. In the mid-1990s Kazakhstan compared poorly even to Uzbekistan in terms of economic reform. Flawed privatization processes generated a great deal of controversy and led to the replacement of at least one prime minister. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan was able to capitalize on its oil and gas resources, the largest in the region, by signing several development agreements.

Nazarbayev's family also gained increasing clout in Kazakhstan public life during this period. His daughters Dariga and Dinara, and

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<sup>15</sup> Dilip Hiro, *Between Marx and Muhammad: The Changing Face of Central Asia* (London: HarperCollins, 1994), 118–19.

their respective husbands Rakhat Aliyev and Timur Kulibayev, became towering figures in Kazakhstan's media, banking, and energy sectors. Kazakhstan is perhaps the only Central Asian country where individuals not deeply connected with politics have been able to amass significant fortunes. The increasing domination of the Nazarbayev family demonstrated, however, the importance the Kazakhstan leadership attached to key sectors of the economy.

The late 1990s proved a turning point for Kazakhstan. The leadership of the country gradually succeeded, despite long odds, in building a sovereign nation-state run mainly by Kazakhs and with a prominent position for Kazakh language and culture—without triggering conflict with the Russian minority. Kazakhstan strongly supported integration within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but insisted on cooperating on equal terms with Russia and other members.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the Kazakh leadership took the bold step of moving the capital from Almaty in the very southwest to the town of Aqmola (subsequently renamed Astana) in the north, at least in part in order to assert control over the northern areas of the country. By bringing the seat of government closer to the northern, predominantly Russian-populated provinces, the move is likely to contribute in the long run to evening out demographic imbalances in the country. As for the economy, oil-led growth began to accelerate in the early years of the new century. Kazakhstan capitalized on this opportunity by developing the leading banking sector in Central Asia and pushing through reforms that had lagged in the 1990s.

Affluence rapidly differentiated Kazakhstan from the rest of the region in economic terms. A GDP larger than that of all other Central Asian states combined has clearly increased Kazakhstan's sense of security. Economic growth has reduced frustration and apprehension among the ethnic Russian minority and weakened the increasingly marginalized political opposition. Moreover, prosperity has blunted the appeal of radical Islamism; Kazakhstan has clearly not faced this threat to the same extent that Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan have.

In the realm of politics, Kazakhstan has held several competitive elections, though the executive remains dominant over the electoral process. The electoral process has improved over the past several elections. Nazarbayev's decision to hold elections to choose regional leaders is an important political reform. Though yet unfulfilled, the commitment stands in stark contrast to recent developments in Russia—where power is increasingly centralized and regional leaders are appointed.

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<sup>16</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 19.

Kazakhstan's economic development and internal stability, second to none in the region, have allowed Astana to make a claim for regional leadership in the past several years. Only five years ago that title would have been reserved for Uzbekistan. In terms of international standing and growing prosperity, Kazakhstan is leading the way in the region. Uzbek president Islam Karimov's reported awe in visiting the new Kazakh capital at Astana in 2006 well illustrates the dramatic reversal in fortunes of these two countries.<sup>17</sup>

Kazakhstan does face the danger of the "resource curse"—oil wealth could still undermine the non-oil economy and distort the political system. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has clearly come a long way since its extremely tenuous position in the early 1990s, when the continued existence and independence of the country were very uncertain. Oil is a leading reason for Kazakhstan's remarkable progress. Much credit must also go, however, to the Kazakh leadership for successfully carrying out the difficult balancing act.

### *Uzbekistan: The Challenges of Unrest Next Door and Radical Islam*

Prior to Russia's conquest of Central Asia in the late nineteenth century, three historical centers of power had existed in Central Asia: the Emirates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand. The 1924–25 national delimitation of Central Asia grouped the lands of all three, and a population almost as large as all other republics combined into the newly created republic of Uzbekistan. The country hence emerged as the most important republic in Central Asia, and has maintained this position after independence. Indeed, the Soviet leadership acknowledged Uzbekistan's predominant role in Central Asia encouraging Uzbekistan to "relate" to Central Asia's other republics as Moscow "relates" to Uzbekistan.<sup>18</sup> Uzbekistan received most of the industrial investments that went to the region. The republic produced more than half of the Soviet Union's cotton and large quantities of natural gas and oil. Uzbekistan upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union also inherited more military equipment, enabling the newly independent state quickly to build the most potent army in the region.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to these advantages, however, independence also left Uzbekistan with serious weaknesses. Much of the countryside was poor, and Soviet rule had exacerbated growing regional disparities through the

<sup>17</sup> Marat Yermukanov, "Islam Karimov Asks for Kazakh Investment to Bolster Uzbek Economy," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 8, no. 18 (September 20, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> Mikhaile Kalinin, *Izbrannye Proizvedeniia, Tom I (1917–1925)* [Selected Works, Vol. I (1917–1925)] (Moscow: 1960), 630, quoted in Donald S. Carlisle, "Geopolitics and Ethnic Problems of Uzbekistan and Its Neighbors," 77.

<sup>19</sup> Pomfret, *The Central Asian Economies since Independence*, 25.

promotion of region-based Uzbek elites. Prior to independence, natives of Samarkand and Tashkent had gradually concentrated political and economic power, sidelining hitherto influential elites from the populous Ferghana Valley. Cotton, energy, and other industries had meanwhile provided power bases for a network of economic elites that intersected with the regional groupings. Following independence, these entrenched interest groups vigorously resisted economic reforms. The cotton “barons,” for instance, have maintained a system of practically indentured low-cost labor—providing social stability and considerable profit in the short term, but at the cost of foregoing obvious potential improvements in efficiency.

Domestic political conflict in Uzbekistan has been more tumultuous than in Kazakhstan. A substantial revival of ethnic nationalism targeted Russians, Meskhetian Turks, Koreans, and other minorities. A clearly discernible revival of radical Islamic movements, most active in the conservative Ferghana Valley that is home to a quarter of the country’s population, emerged. In the city of Namangan, a group split off from the all-union Islamic Renaissance Party to form the Adolat (Justice) Party and demanded the creation of an Islamic state. The party’s leaders attempted, sometimes successfully, to take over the roles of local government and law enforcement bodies—even going so far as to receive emissaries from Saudi Arabian religious charities.<sup>20</sup> When civil war erupted in Tajikistan in 1992 the government mustered the courage to crack down on the radicals. The Islamists fled, but only to join other radical Islamists participating in the conflict in Tajikistan. Meanwhile, another civil war intensified on the southern border of Uzbekistan in Afghanistan.

The Uzbek leadership believed they had narrowly avoided civil war by cracking down on radical movements before the Islamists became strong enough to overpower the fledgling institutions of the Uzbek state, as occurred in Tajikistan. This perception of vulnerability colored the entire Uzbek state-building process, strengthening the hand of those seeking to centralize power and restrict the liberalization process first introduced in the late Soviet era. Thus Uzbekistan began, earlier than its neighbors, to restrict political freedoms, undermine and eventually ban opposition movements, and retrench state control over the economy.<sup>21</sup> President

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<sup>20</sup> Vitaly V. Naumkin, “Militant Islam in Central Asia: The Case of the Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan,” Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies, Working Paper Series, Spring 2003, 20–21; and Michael Fredholm, *Uzbekistan and the Threat from Islamic Extremism*, no. K39 (Sandhurst: Royal Military Academy of the United Kingdom Conflict Studies Research Centre, March 2003), 4.

<sup>21</sup> William Friedman, “Political Developments in Uzbekistan: Democratization?” in Dawisha and Parrott, *Conflict, Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 384–93.

Karimov himself openly made the case that Uzbekistan had to build its economy and institutions prior to implementing democracy.<sup>22</sup>

Uzbekistan has not, however, been without internal debates on domestic politics; these discussions have just never been held publicly. Reformist forces did develop in, and eventually control, the ministries of defense and foreign affairs. From these institutional bases the reformers sought to push the president to liberalize the country's political system and facilitate improved relations with the West. The limited political thaws that have intermittently occurred in Uzbekistan are testimony to the influence of these progressive forces. Yet the so-called power ministries—such as those of interior and national security—have long acted (and often in tandem with informal vested interests) as powerful brakes on any liberalization.

Regardless, opinion polls throughout the 1990s demonstrated that President Karimov's rhetoric of sustaining order and preventing instability and chaos received considerable backing among the Uzbek population. By a large margin Uzbeks appeared to continue to favor stability, even at the cost of political freedoms.<sup>23</sup> Uzbekistan's success in avoiding the economic collapse that befell virtually all post-Soviet states was an important factor in this regard. Uzbekistan experienced the smallest reduction in GDP after independence of any other former Soviet state. As a consequence, Uzbekistan maintained a relatively unreformed economy, only gradually introducing very moderate economic reforms in the mid to late 1990s.<sup>24</sup>

As the 1990s drew to a close, Uzbekistan seemed firmly established as the regional leader in Central Asia. Though authoritarian, the country was politically as well as economically stable. Uzbekistan also appeared to be the only country in the region to assume an independent and proactive international role. Uzbekistan's progressive forces had even established good relations with the United States and undertaken the most comprehensive military reforms in the former Soviet Union. Yet the situation would soon change for the worse. Unwillingness to reform resulted in gradual economic stagnation just as the leadership of Kazakhstan was embarking on a reform program. Meanwhile, the Uzbek Islamic militants moved to Afghanistan where the Taliban was now extending its power to the northern areas. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) was formally founded in Kabul in 1998. In February 1999 a series of bomb explosions rocked Tashkent and

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<sup>22</sup> Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997).

<sup>23</sup> Timur Dadabaev, "Public Confidence, Trust and Participation in Post-Soviet Central Asia," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 8, no. 11 (May 31, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> For an overview of Uzbekistan's economic policies, see Pomfret, *Central Asian Economies*, 23–39.

almost killed Karimov. That same summer (as well as the next) the IMU used bases in Tajikistan to attack areas in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>25</sup>

Uzbekistan reacted by turning inward out of concern for the stability and security of both nation and regime. Uzbekistan decided to close and mine its Fergana Valley borders with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, despite the resulting extremely negative impact on local communities dependent on cross-border linkages in this maze of borders and territorial enclaves. On the domestic front Tashkent intensified its campaign against Islamic extremists, adopting a blanket strategy that often led to persecution of all Islamic movements not under state control. This campaign especially targeted more extremist Islamic sects termed as “Wahhabists” in a wholesale manner by the Uzbek authorities.<sup>26</sup> This harsh government repression of Islamic movements continued, even after the IMU—which had posed the greatest threat to Uzbekistan’s security—was decimated in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks.<sup>27</sup> Some of these groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, have become radicalized. As regional expert Zeyno Baran has argued, this group now “operates as an ideological vanguard that supports and encourages terrorist acts.”<sup>28</sup> As a result of these policies Uzbekistan has remained among the least reformed countries in Eurasia in both political and economic terms. For Uzbekistan this lack of reform has led not only to complications in international affairs (as explained below) but also to increasing stagnation in the early 21st century. Meanwhile the growing influence of solidarity groups on the Uzbek political and economic system is paralyzing government and making reforms difficult. Extensive purges of the progressive and pro-Western forces that dominated the ministries of foreign affairs and defense accompanied the collapse of U.S.-Uzbekistan relations in 2005, allowing the repressive forces more closely affiliated with informal power structures to dominate the agenda. Concomitantly, public dissatisfaction has grown considerably in recent years in response to the country’s economic stagnation and the increasing arbitrariness of

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<sup>25</sup> Svante E. Cornell, “Narcotics, Radicalism and Armed Conflict in Central Asia: The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 17, no. 3 (2005): 577–97.

<sup>26</sup> Adeeb Khalid, “A Secular Islam: Nation, State and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 4 (November 2003): 573–98.

<sup>27</sup> Hizb-ut-Tahrir claims both to be non-violent and to seek to change society through peaceful means. The ideology that lies at its base is, however, by no means non-violent. Harshly anti-Semitic, the group’s beliefs are fundamentally opposed to liberal democracy. See Zeyno Baran, *Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Islam’s Political Insurgency* (Washington, D.C.: Nixon Center, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Zeyno Baran, “Radical Islamists in Central Asia,” in *Current Trends in Islamic Ideology*, ed. Hillel Fradkin, Hussain Haqqani, and Eric Brown (Washington, D.C.: Hudson Institute, 2005), 42. See also Zeyno Baran, S. Frederick Starr, and Svante E. Cornell, *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus: Implications for the EU*, Silk Road Paper, June 2006 (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006).

government policy. Uzbekistan once portrayed itself as a bastion of stability but now is apparently becoming increasingly unstable—a development that holds important consequences for the region.

## Regional Politics: The Structure of Instability

Central Asia's regional politics are based on several factors. At the foundation lie the Central Asian states' threat perceptions with regard to each other, great powers, or transnational threats such as Islamic radicalism and drug trafficking.<sup>29</sup> Two factors have, however, contributed to the sustained instability in the region's international affairs. The first factor is the interplay of small states with regional powers, as well as the impact on the region of the inter-relationships among these powers. A second factor is Western states' growing insistence on freedom and democracy which, given the authoritarian environment of Central Asia's setting, has upset the predominantly realpolitik character of the region's international affairs.

### *Small States and Regional Powers*

As noted earlier, Central Asia's states are small relative to their larger and more powerful neighbors. This power imbalance is exacerbated by the Central Asian states' weakness and lack of mechanisms for regional cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, regional politics remain fluid and unpredictable.<sup>31</sup> Many states, neighboring as well as further afield, have developed interests in Central Asia. Despite its geopolitical location, however, Central Asia is not central to the interests of any of these states, whose main priorities lie elsewhere. Although Central Asia briefly occupied a place of importance on the U.S. agenda between 2001 and 2003, that agenda changed after the invasion of Iraq. China is far more concerned with Taiwan and the Korean peninsula. Even Russia, despite its historical influence and interests in Central Asia, is more preoccupied with the Caucasus and Russian relations with the West (though Russia remains the country with the most interest in the region). Smaller powers such as Iran, India, and Turkey also have other concerns that trump Central Asia in their considerations. As a result the policies of most powers in the region are characterized by irregular efforts

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<sup>29</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "Regional Perspectives on Military and Economic Security in the Caucasus and Central Asia," The National Bureau of Asian Research, *NBR Analysis* 14, no. 3 (October 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Niklas L. P. Swanström, "The Prospects for Multilateral Conflict Prevention and Regional Cooperation in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 1 (March 2004): 41–53.

<sup>31</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "The United States and Central Asia: In the Steppes to Stay?" *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 239–54.

or short-term initiatives rather than consistent strategies. A stable regional environment has yet to emerge.<sup>32</sup>

For most of the 1990s, no power had the capacity or desire to play a dominant role in Central Asian politics. Russia's influence gradually waned despite President Vladimir Putin's renewed efforts to assert a role for Moscow as the primary arbiter of regional affairs.<sup>33</sup> Turkey and Iran sought to exercise influence in the region in the early 1990s, ultimately realizing, however, that they lacked the necessary resources.<sup>34</sup> China has silently increased its influence in the region since the mid-1990s but has not developed a dominant influence on any particular country.<sup>35</sup> The support of Pakistan for the Taliban visibly failed to accomplish Pakistan's dual goals of ensuring a pliant Afghan government and securing access to Central Asia.<sup>36</sup> Attempts by India to expand political influence in Central Asia, meanwhile, remain limited as a result of India's geographic distance from the region.<sup>37</sup>

Regional arrangements proved unsuccessful. Russian and Chinese interlocutors sought to employ the "Shanghai mechanism," originally conceived in 1995 to resolve border conflicts between the Soviet successor states and China, in order to establish a Central Asia collective security framework in 2001.<sup>38</sup> Though the regional states joined the revamped Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Central Asian nations were reluctant to be subsumed by the organization. The weakness of this Chinese-Russian mechanism is best illustrated by the speed and openness with which the Central Asian states welcomed U.S. forces on their territory following the attacks of September 11. Unlike the SCO, which offered little in terms of economic aid or military protection, new partnerships with Washington provided Central Asian regimes with enhanced security and a concomitant broadening of their foreign relations. The failure of the United

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<sup>32</sup> S. Frederick Starr, Charles J. Fairbanks, Richard Nelson, and Kenneth Weisbrode, *A Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia* (Washington, D.C.: Atlantic Council and Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2001).

<sup>33</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, "Taking Stock of Central Asia," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 4.

<sup>34</sup> Svante Cornell and Maria Sultan, "The New Geopolitics of Central Eurasia," *Marco Polo Magazine*, no. 5–6 (Winter 2000–2001); and Svante E. Cornell, "Regional Politics in Central Asia: The Changing Roles of Iran, Turkey, Pakistan," in *India and Central Asia: Building Linkages in an Age of Turbulence*, ed. Indranil Banerjee (Middlesex: Brunel Academic Publishers, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Niklas L. P. Swanström, "China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China* 14, no. 45 (November 2005): 569–84.

<sup>36</sup> Imtiaz Gul, *The Unholy Nexus: Pak-Afghan Relations under the Taliban* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002).

<sup>37</sup> Stephen J. Blank, "India's Rising Profile in Central Asia," *Comparative Strategy* 22, no. 2 (April–June 2003): 139–57; and Juli MacDonald, "Rethinking India's and Pakistan's Regional Intent," *The National Bureau of Asian Research, NBR Analysis* 14, no. 4, November 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Shanghai Cooperative Organization: A Post-Mortem," *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Newsletter*, no. 3 (2002): 12–13.



States to sustain engagement with the region has, however, led Moscow and Beijing to redevelop the SCO and use it as a vehicle for minimizing Western interests in the region.<sup>39</sup>

On a deeper level, these constantly changing priorities and capacities have generated a structural instability. The current constellation of forces in and around Central Asia has produced a zero-sum jockeying for power. A mechanism for cooperation based on mutual restraint and including all major powers—the United States, Europe, and Japan, as well as neighboring countries—is necessary to address this instability. The prospects for such a structure to emerge in the short term are, however, extremely low.

### *U.S. Interests in Central Asia: Contradictory or Compatible?*

U.S. interests in Central Asia are diverse, falling roughly into three categories: security, energy and trade, and governance. Security interests stem from the realization that the United States is engaged in a “long war” against Islamic radicalism. Preserving strategic access to Central Asia and developing security ties with the states of the region have become important priorities in this conflict. Secondly, the United States has long worked for the westward export of the Caspian region’s energy resources, both for the sake of sustaining the independence and sovereignty of the regional states and in view of their effect on regional and global energy markets. As energy markets tightened and oil prices soared, this gradually became an even more important issue. Aside from energy, the United States has also promoted the development of continental trade in the region.<sup>40</sup> Governance interests, lastly, include a consistent U.S. emphasis on internal reform in the mainly authoritarian Central Asian countries. Both principle and pragmatism have contributed to this objective. Support for democratization and human rights has become a moral element of Western foreign policy, shared by both the United States and the European Union (EU). Moreover, democratization is increasingly understood as a means to address perceived root causes of terrorism such as socio-economic backwardness and political repression.

U.S. policymakers have nevertheless failed to overcome a perception that these objectives are inherently contradictory. After September 11, for instance, many at home and abroad strongly criticized Washington for once again allying with dictators out of narrow U.S. security purposes and thereby ignoring human rights and democracy. These contradictions are

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<sup>39</sup> Vladimir Socor, “The Unfolding of the U.S.-Uzbekistan Crisis,” in Daly et al., *Anatomy of a Crisis*, 44–65.

<sup>40</sup> S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The New Silk Roads: Transport and Trade in Greater Central Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 2007), 5–31.

more imagined than real, however. The argument that interests in security and energy are harmful to reform and democratization stems from a view of the governments of the region as monolithic and authoritarian—ignoring the array of forces, as described above, that influence the Central Asian regimes. This same view has led European and U.S. policymakers to focus on bringing about change by supporting NGOs, rather than by working with government offices themselves. Representatives of the media and human rights communities in particular often view cooperation with and assistance to governments as strengthening authoritarian rule. By the same token, critics see Western interests in energy or security as providing the regional governments with leverage and instruments to withstand pressures for reform and sustain authoritarian rule.

In practice, however, all governments of the region include a mixture of forces favoring reform and forces favoring authoritarian rule. The latter are often deeply corrupt or controlled by special interest groups, reinforcing the authoritarian tendencies of opponents of reform. Because of the Western emphasis on democracy, transparency, and openness, those benefiting from corruption are typically opponents of a Western orientation. These groups tend to favor instead a closer relationship with Russia, which pays little attention to a government's domestic characteristics. On the other hand, advocates of reform are typically pro-Western, seeing in Western institutions the tools, assistance, and guidance necessary for meaningful reform. Support for these pro-reform groups has enabled them to exert a positive influence on governance by promoting reform or checking the influence of repressive forces. The considerable worsening of the already precarious human rights situation in Uzbekistan in 2005–06, for instance, coincided with a purge of pro-Western forces from that country's government.

The dilemma the United States is said to face, therefore, is a false one. An approach that treats U.S. interests in security, energy, and governance as contradictory is a self-fulfilling prophecy that in fact undermines each goal. Interest in democratization, for instance, has led the United States and Europe to support civil society as a counterweight to authoritarian rule. Meanwhile, the West has ignored or shunned work with state institutions, considering them corrupt or work with them impossible. Even before the “freedom agenda” grew in force with the Eurasian color revolutions, the Central Asian ruling elites increasingly perceived these policies as antagonistic. Policies intended to encourage democratization consequently had the perverse effects of undermining the progressive forces in government that constituted the best hope both for gradual political and economic reform and for strengthening the very autocratic forces that Western policies were designed to counter. Non-governmental (and some governmental) groups

in the West have a strong tendency to see isolation, exclusion, and finger-pointing as the preferred ways to deal with authoritarian governments. By undermining both progressive forces in government and Western influence, such methods are in effect the surest ways to bring about the victory of authoritarian-minded forces in countries such as those of Central Asia. The timing of the emergence of the “freedom agenda”—just as President Putin has consolidated his increasingly authoritarian presidency—has further undermined the chances for successful democratization.

### *An Authoritarian Neighborhood and the Democracy Agenda*

Pragmatic calculations of self-interest have been the primary determinant of Central Asian politics. The realist understanding of international affairs is, therefore, particularly relevant. External powers and regional states all have based their policies on their self-perceived national interests. Ideology has had very little influence on the region—especially during the 1990s, but also in the first years following the events of September 11. Emphasizing domestic governance, human rights, and democratic reforms in their relationships with the region, Western powers, and especially the United States, have always balanced such factors with national interests in security, energy, or other issues. Because the West had limited interests and influence in the region during this time period, however, the emphasis on democracy and governance did not upset international relations in the region. Central Asian regimes did not perceive these policies as a threat to either stability or regime security. As a result, democratization was neither an asset nor a liability for the United States in its relationship with Central Asia.

This was to change following the turn of the century, however, for two major reasons. The first was Vladimir Putin’s presidency in Russia. Whereas his predecessor Boris Yeltsin had been a convinced democrat, Putin soon after taking power showed himself to be an equally convinced autocrat. Although Yeltsin had not made democracy an element of Russian foreign policy in the region, his democratic credentials had helped reform movements and democratic forces in Central Asia. Under Putin’s authoritarian rule Russia ceased to be a model of development for democrats in Central Asia. Russia’s growing authoritarianism instead emboldened Central Asian rulers to increase their authoritarian practices. These rulers also valued the predictability of Putin’s policies as compared to Yeltsin’s.<sup>41</sup> The second factor was the onset of color revolutions in the

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<sup>41</sup> Sally N. Cummings, “Happier Bedfellows? Russia and Central Asia under Putin,” *Asian Affairs* 32, no. 2 (2001): 149.

former Soviet Union. Coinciding with a growing focus on the promotion of democracy and freedom in U.S. foreign policy, these revolutions introduced a strong ideological element into Central Asian politics.

The democracy agenda, of course, has long been a factor in U.S. foreign policy.<sup>42</sup> A growing focus on democracy was clearly visible in the Bush administration's policies from 2003 onward.<sup>43</sup> This "Bush Doctrine" particularly affected the post-Soviet space through the color revolutions, beginning in Georgia in 2003. Georgia's "Rose Revolution" was widely seen as a U.S.-sponsored revolution, made possible through the work of various U.S.-funded NGOs. This event upset post-Soviet leaders, such as Kyrgyzstan's weakened president Askar Akayev; the United States, however, seemed happy to take some credit. The Georgian revolution initially seemed to be an isolated event. The "Orange Revolution," led by Viktor Yushchenko, that prevented the Ukrainian leadership under Leonid Kuchma from securing the election of a designated successor indicated that the events in Tbilisi were not isolated. The collapse of the Akayev regime a few months later, which forced Akayev to flee the country, put the entire region on high alert. Led by President Putin, leaders across the region began restricting the activities of NGOs working on democratization and human rights issues, as well as all groups with foreign funding more generally. Democracy promotion increasingly came to be seen as an alien, externally induced phenomenon rather than a domestically rooted process.<sup>44</sup> This backlash swept across Central Asia, ironically joined by the new government in Kyrgyzstan, which soon felt as weak and vulnerable as the ousted Akayev regime had.

Suddenly, ideology had mixed with realpolitik. Central Asian rulers no longer perceived the United States as simply supporting improvements in governance and gradual democratization. The U.S. goal now appeared instead to be regime change—the removal, with the help of U.S. funding, of some rulers in order to replace them with other, more pro-Western ones. The domestic roots of these upheavals and the limited nature of the support they received from abroad mattered little; the Bush administration heaped praise on revolutionary governments, often for good reason, while Russian leaders actively portrayed the United States as the architect of the revolutions. Gradually, the region's leaders—conflating their regime security with stability—began to view the influence of the United States in the region

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<sup>42</sup> Michael McFaul, "Democracy Promotion as a World Value," *Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (2006): 147–63.

<sup>43</sup> Jonathan Monets, "The Roots of the Bush Doctrine," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 112–56.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 2 (2006): 55–68.

as a destabilizing factor.<sup>45</sup> In associating these revolutions with the United States, the Central Asian governments came to fundamentally reappraise U.S. trustworthiness.

Putin capitalized on these fears by offering Russian support as a bulwark against regime change promoted by the West. As Pavel Baev has noted, Russian foreign policy under Putin, previously based only on energy politics and counterterrorism, now added a third, “counter-revolutionary” leg, with the goal of “preserving authoritarian regimes in post-Soviet state.”<sup>46</sup> Putin enlisted Beijing to help Moscow rapidly revamp the SCO as an institution through which common positions could be announced and Central Asian leaders could be persuaded to follow Russian regional leadership. Through the SCO Moscow and Beijing worked successfully for the removal of the U.S. base in Uzbekistan in 2005 and almost succeeded in achieving the same outcome in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>47</sup>

The juxtaposition of ideology and realpolitik in Central Asia has been tremendously detrimental both to U.S. interests and to the cause of democracy and good governance in Central Asia more broadly. On the one hand, the United States has lost much of the influence and goodwill that Washington had built up in the region in the aftermath of the events of September 11. U.S. policymakers have now been relegated to reacting to the policy initiatives brought forward by Moscow and Beijing. On the other hand, the West has been powerless to halt the backlash against pro-democracy NGOs in the region and beyond. The mistrust between Central Asian governments and the politically active civil societies in the region is greater than ever. In this context the interaction of domestic and foreign policies in Central Asia is of the utmost importance.

## Domestic and Foreign Policies: Interaction

Domestic and foreign policies are interlinked to varying degrees in all of the states of Central Asia. The considerable economic interests and the perceptions of the aims of foreign powers of the various elite groups shape these groups’ priorities and the foreign policy decisions of the states themselves. As will be described below, the backlash against U.S. interests may have peaked. Washington’s efforts to rebuild confidence and Moscow’s

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<sup>45</sup> Boasts of a “mission accomplished” by the Freedom House director in Bishkek upon President Akayev’s hurried escape from Kyrgyzstan did not help the perception of the United States in the region. Richard Spencer, “Quiet American Behind Tulip Revolution,” *Daily Telegraph*, April 2, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Pavel K. Baev, “Turning Counter-Terrorism into Counter-Revolution: Russia Focuses on Kazakhstan and Engages Turkmenistan,” *European Security* 15, no. 1 (March 2006): 4.

<sup>47</sup> For details of this episode, see Daly et al., *Anatomy of a Crisis*.

overreaching have led the Central Asian states to seek balance once again and overcome their suspicions of U.S. ambitions in the region.

### *Uzbekistan's U-Turns*

The most dramatic shifts in Central Asian politics involve Uzbekistan. Tashkent has long been known to make abrupt reversals on a variety of issues. To take just one example, Uzbekistan left the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty in 1999 only to join immediately the pro-Western GUAM alliance,<sup>48</sup> then suspended its activities with GUAM in 2002 and officially quit in early May 2005. Events in 2005 trumped these turns, however. The U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship had been faltering for a considerable time. In 2004 the United States decertified Uzbekistan for not making progress on human rights and political reform and thus cut assistance to the country. The Uzbek government then brutally cracked down on an upheaval in the Ferghana Valley city of Andijan in May 2005, where at least 180 people and possibly many more were killed. The Andijan events were rapidly defined by the international media as a “massacre” of unarmed civilians. Nevertheless, the events remain highly controversial. Many Western observers, especially in the human rights community, maintain that the government opened fire unprovoked. These critics insist that the victims were unarmed protestors, unaffiliated with any radical groups.<sup>49</sup> Other scholars view the event as being much more complex. Without denying or excusing the excessive use of force by the Uzbek authorities, these observers nevertheless argue that the protestors were armed, began their uprising with an attack on a government arms depot, and used civilians as human shields. Moreover, these scholars argue that strong indications suggest the protestors were members of militant Islamic organizations.<sup>50</sup>

Andijan turned out to be a watershed moment in Uzbek foreign policy. Growing criticism from the United States and Europe, demands for an international investigation, and targeted sanctions imposed on Uzbekistan all combined to push Uzbekistan's relations with the West to

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<sup>48</sup> The GUAM alliance consists of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

<sup>49</sup> “Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising,” International Crisis Group, Asia Briefing no. 38, May 25, 2005; and Rachel Denber, ed., “Bullets Were Falling Like Rain: The Andijan Massacre, May 13, 2005,” Human Rights Watch 17, no. 5, June 2005.

<sup>50</sup> Shirin Akiner, *Violence in Andijan: An Independent Assessment*, Silk Road Paper, July 2005, (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2005), 14, 17, 21, 27–29; John C. K. Daly, “The Andijan Disturbances and their Implications,” *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* 6, no. 3 (June 29, 2005); Margarita Assenova, “Uzbekistan Is Running Out of Time,” *Internationale Politik* (Fall 2005); Baran et al., *Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia and the Caucasus*; and Abdumannob Polat, “Reassessing Andijan: The Road to Restoring U.S.-Uzbek Relations,” Jamestown Foundation, Occasional Paper, June 2007.

the breaking point. The United States had supported the transfer to other countries of Andijan refugees who had been sheltering in Kyrgyzstan; this support infuriated the Uzbek authorities, who argued that the refugees included armed militants. On July 29 the Uzbek government informed U.S. embassy in Tashkent that U.S. troops would be required to vacate the Kharshi-Khanabad (K2) airbase near the Afghan border within 180 days, effectively severing the U.S.-Uzbekistan strategic partnership that had been signed in 2002. Russia and Uzbekistan signed an alliance treaty on November 14—seven days before the U.S. flag was lowered from the K2 base.<sup>51</sup> Tashkent spared no efforts to reverse its long-standing foreign policy of distancing itself from Moscow. In the following months, Tashkent acceded to the two most important Russian-led multilateral organizations in the region, joining the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in January 2006 and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in June of the same year.<sup>52</sup> The Uzbek government also opened the country to Russian investment. A deal with Gazprom allowed the Russian state-owned natural gas monopoly to develop some of Uzbekistan's largest gas fields. Another agreement committed Uzbekistan to sell gas to Russia at the steeply discounted price of \$80 per thousand cubic meters. Russia, meanwhile, sells gas to Europe for three times as much and purchases gas from even Turkmenistan at a higher price.<sup>53</sup>

These bold steps have worked to reverse the course of a decade and a half of Uzbek foreign policy. Since this new direction was taken, Tashkent has apparently sought to restore some balance in Uzbekistan's foreign relations. Uzbekistan has reached out to Europe and quietly attempted to rebuild ties to the United States. Visitors to Uzbekistan now report a widespread feeling that the government, including President Karimov personally, reacted emotionally and in an exaggerated manner to U.S. actions in 2005 and early 2006. Nevertheless the prospects for a restoration of relations are slim as long as Karimov's government stays in place.

Tashkent's decisions during this period are difficult to understand. As scholar Gregory Gleason has noted, the "about-face was not caused by any single incident but was the result of a cumulative series of events that culminated in the spring of 2005." After the color revolutions:

Karimov realized that he was facing two starkly different choices. He could out-compete the democratic "color revolutions" by introducing serious governance

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<sup>51</sup> Socor, "The Unfolding of the U.S.-Uzbekistan Crisis," 61.

<sup>52</sup> The CSTO is the successor organization to the Collective Security Treaty that Uzbekistan had left in 1999. "CSTO Readmits Uzbekistan as Full-Fledged Member: Putin," *People's Daily Online*, June 24, 2006, [http://english.people.com.cn/200606/24/eng20060624\\_276876.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200606/24/eng20060624_276876.html).

<sup>53</sup> Daly et al., *Anatomy of a Crisis*, 108.

reforms, or he could try to enlist the help of outside allies to strengthen his regime...enlisting new allies to prop up the regime would entail a complete reversal of Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Karimov chose the latter course.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, this conflation of national and regime interests explains a great deal of Uzbek foreign policy in this period. The ruling elite that comprise an authoritarian regime commonly view societal interests and their own interests as identical.<sup>55</sup> This view perhaps stems from a ruling elite belief that they are the only force capable of formulating and defending the interests of the nation; the regime thus believes that if they were removed from power disaster would ensue for the country. More pragmatically, the regime could simply be seeking to safeguard the profits of its position or fear the consequences of losing power.<sup>56</sup> In reality, these two categories of motivation may be impossible to separate.

In the case of Uzbekistan the government's foreign policy until 2005, although occasionally capricious, nevertheless derived from a stable understanding of the national interests of the country. In the interest of achieving independence and sovereignty, Uzbekistan crafted a policy of developing close ties with the United States in order to balance pressure from Moscow. The government followed its policy meticulously, despite occasional setbacks. For example in 1999 after Washington failed to provide Tashkent with the assistance he had requested Karimov turned to Moscow, but only after having signed partnership deals with China as a demonstration that Uzbekistan was a regional player with other options available.<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding the occasional disappointment, the Uzbek leadership persevered in its quest for balance. Even before September 11, the government took every opportunity to seek closer ties with the West. The government's decisions in 2005, however, diverge completely from this pattern. Tashkent's move toward Moscow appears irrational and emotional. In return for little visible benefit, Uzbekistan sacrificed important elements of sovereignty (the energy sector for example) and contradicted a foreign policy that had previously been rather effective. EurAsEC will benefit Uzbekistan's economy little; the CSTO, meanwhile, does little to enhance Uzbekistan's security.

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<sup>54</sup> Gregory Gleason, "The Uzbek Expulsion of U.S. Forces and Realignment in Central Asia," *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 2 (March/April 2006): 50.

<sup>55</sup> See Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and James Lee Ray, "The National Interest versus Individual Political Ambition: Democracy, Autocracy, and the Reciprocation of Force and Violence in Militarized Interstate Disputes," in *The Scourge of War: New Extensions of an Old Problem*, ed. Paul Diehl (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 94–119.

<sup>56</sup> Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Uzbekistan and the United States: Friends or Foes?" *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2007).

<sup>57</sup> Svante E. Cornell, "Uzbekistan: A Regional Player in Eurasian Geopolitics," *European Security* 9, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 115–40.



The only plausible explanation based on the information available is that the Karimov regime saw its linkage with the United States as a threat either to Uzbekistan's national security or to its own regime security—or to both. There were rumors circulating in Tashkent in 2005 that U.S. officials had met and struck a deal with the IMU in Afghanistan; though sounding absurd, these rumors do support the former explanation. While these rumors are wildly unlikely, given that the IMU is allied with al Qaeda, parts of the Uzbek security apparatus apparently believed them—or at least used them for ulterior motives. Intelligence services hostile to the presence of the United States in Central Asia were likely responsible for spreading the misinformation. Why the rumors were believed in Tashkent despite being so illogical is unclear. If Tashkent indeed saw the Andijan uprising as a harbinger of Islamic rebellion, it must also have assumed, perhaps erroneously, that the United States had enough intelligence on the issue to come to the same conclusion. Though requiring a leap of logic, such a series of interpretations could, in the absence of honest dialogue and mutual confidence, have led Tashkent to conclude that Washington indeed had subversive intentions that would harm the sovereignty and independence of Uzbekistan in addition to the regime's security.

The alternative interpretation is that Tashkent perceived Washington's support for democratic revolutions in Eurasia as an implicit declaration of war against all authoritarian regimes such as itself. This interpretation would explain the excessive leaps toward Moscow that Tashkent took in 2005 and 2006. Alignment with Russia may have been determined more by the ruling elite's needs for regime security than by its understanding of Uzbekistan's national security. In the final analysis, it will likely be years before the true thinking behind Uzbekistan's u-turn in 2005 is understood. A likely explanation, however, is that more narrow interests than those of Uzbekistan as a state affected the decisions.

### *Kazakhstan's Balancing*

Kazakhstan began its course as an independent state by relying on relations with Moscow. As noted above, the Kazakhstan elite perceived Moscow as a threat to the independence of Kazakhstan and aligned with Moscow in order to reduce this threat.<sup>58</sup> Under the leadership of long-time foreign minister Kassymzhomart Tokayev, however, Kazakhstan established a policy based on the Uzbek model of balancing Russian dominance in order to safeguard and consolidate independence. Kazakhstan did so in a more long-term, methodic, and less confrontational manner than Uzbekistan.

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*.

In what Starr has called a “characteristic combination of eagerness and prudence,” Kazakhstan began to develop relations with China.<sup>59</sup> Resilient suspicion and fear of China, stemming partly from ethnic tensions and partly from continued fear of Maoist encroachment, were still persistent among the Kazakh elite. Nevertheless, as Nazarbayev explained in the chapter on national security in his text *Kazakhstan 2030*:

To ensure our independence and territorial integrity, we must be a strong state and maintain friendly relations with our neighbours, which is why we shall develop and consolidate relations of confidence and equality with our closest and historically equal neighbour—Russia. Likewise we shall develop just as confident and good-neighbourly relations with the PRC [People’s Republic of China] on a mutually advantageous basis. Kazakhstan welcomes the policy pursued by China for it *is aimed against hegemonism* and favours friendship with neighbouring countries.<sup>60</sup>

The description of China as an anti-hegemonic power is a clear indication of the balancing act that Nazarbayev was proposing; in the Central Asian context, hegemony can only be understood as referring to Russian domination. Kazakhstan has continuously developed its relationship with its great eastern neighbor, despite simultaneous concerns of possible Chinese economic domination of the region in the long term. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan took on an active role in Asia, for example by hosting initiatives on confidence-building. In 1997 Tokayev explicitly used the term “balance” in describing Kazakhstan’s foreign relations, noting the strategic relationships with both Russia and China. Following this, Kazakhstan sought to broaden its energy security by agreeing to and eventually building (against Moscow’s will) an oil pipeline to China, completed in 2005. Gradually, and without the use of harsh rhetoric, Kazakhstan asserted its independence. Starr offers the following analysis:

The challenge for Astana is to balance [the multiple strategic partnerships] in ways that are mutually beneficial, that minimize or curtail the worst tendencies of each partner, and that in the end strengthen the sovereignty and independence of Kazakhstan itself. Because each strategic partner is seen as complementary to the other, both relationships, and the relation between them, must be based on trust. All this requires delicacy and art.<sup>61</sup>

Developments in the late 1990s certainly created difficulties for the strategy of Nazarbayev and Tokayev. Though Kazakhstan had embraced

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<sup>59</sup> S. Frederick Starr, “Kazakhstan’s Security Strategy: A Model for Central Asia?” *Central Asia Affairs*, no. 3, (January 2007): 4.

<sup>60</sup> See “Kazakhstan 2030,” Embassy of Kazakhstan to the United States and Canada website, <http://kazakhembus.com/Kazakhstan2030.html>; emphasis added.

<sup>61</sup> Starr, “Kazakhstan’s Security Strategy: A Model for Central Asia?” 8.

the Shanghai forum and later the SCO as a Chinese-led initiative, rapprochement between Moscow and Beijing allowed the two great powers to coordinate joint policies toward the region—effectively reducing the utility of relations with China as a balancer to Russia, at least for the short term. This led Kazakhstan to more actively seek to develop ties with the West, despite much-publicized allegations of high-level corruption that constrained U.S.-Kazakh relations.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Kazakhstan moved rapidly, even before September 11, to develop its relationship with the West. By adding a third strategic partnership, one with the United States, Astana sought to add a third balancing force to its foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> Following September 11, Kazakhstan expressed support for the United States and offered the use of its airspace, though geographical distance from Afghanistan ensured that the question of a U.S. military base was not seriously broached. Moreover, despite continuing involvement in the CSTO and SCO, Kazakhstan was also the only Central Asian state to develop a relationship with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to the point of submitting an Individual Partnership Action Plan, accepted in January 2006.<sup>64</sup> (Uzbekistan had initiated but never completed this process, cutting most of its links to NATO in 2005.) Kazakhstan also supported U.S.-sponsored efforts to advance trade and transportation through Afghanistan in a north-south direction.<sup>65</sup>

The color revolutions proved the same shock for Astana as they did for Tashkent. Like that of Uzbekistan, the Kazakh elite has also been accused of placing private interests over national interests in foreign policymaking.<sup>66</sup> Astana's reaction to the events nevertheless diverged strongly from Tashkent's. On the one hand, Nazarbayev's government clearly was concerned by the developments; several analysts noted a slide toward positions espoused by Moscow and Beijing.<sup>67</sup> Kazakhstan also intensified

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, Seymour M. Hersh, "The Price of Oil," *New Yorker*, July 9, 2001.

<sup>63</sup> Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy: A Model for Central Asia?" 9.

<sup>64</sup> See Roger McDermott, "Kazakhstan's Partnership with NATO: Strengths, Limits and Prognosis," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 5, no. 1 (February 2007): 7–20.

<sup>65</sup> Niklas Norling, ed., "First Kabul Conference on Partnership, Trade and Development in Greater Central Asia," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Conference Report, April 2006, 8–12.

<sup>66</sup> Tor Bukvoll, "Astana's Privatised Independence: Private and National Interests in the Foreign Policy of Nursultan Nazarbayev," *Nationalities Papers* 32, no. 3 (September 2004).

<sup>67</sup> Pavel Baev, "Turning Counter-terrorism into Counter-revolution," 11; and Stephen Blank, "Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy in a Time of Turmoil," *Eurasia Insight*, April 27, 2005.

efforts to develop relations with the United States, however.<sup>68</sup> A series of reciprocal visits illustrates these efforts: Foreign Minister Tokayev visited the United States in September 2002 and again in early September 2006, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Astana in October 2005, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney visited Astana in May 2006, and President Nazarbayev visited Washington in September 2006. Astana also worked quietly but consistently to develop multiple options for energy resource exports. One example is plans to export both oil and gas through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (a U.S.-supported project completed in 2005) initially by barges but holding the option of a Trans-Caspian pipeline open in the longer term.

The policies of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have diverged primarily in the nature of the strategic partnerships the two countries have built. Uzbekistan has pursued more antagonistic and exclusive relations: when the country leaned toward the West, Uzbek relations with Russia soured and rhetoric against Russian ambitions grew fairly loud. Conversely, Uzbekistan leaned increasingly on Russia as relations with the United States worsened and anti-American diatribes from Tashkent grew louder. The pursuit of good relations with any one great power for Tashkent has come at the expense of relations with another. Kazakhstan has pursued a different policy, seeking inclusive and compatible relationships with the three great powers of most consequence in the region. Kazakhstan has built ties with the United States in tandem with, rather than at the expense of, ties with Russia. Both foreign policies seek balance, albeit in different manners.

Several factors account for these differences. First of all, no incident similar to that at Andijan occurred in Kazakhstan; in general, the internal threats to the Kazakh ruling elite are much less acute. Kazakhstan's form of government is among the most open in Central Asia. Though Kazakhstan's multi-party elections allow opposition parties to participate, the elections have never been termed free or fair by the international community and substantial problems in terms of political freedoms and human rights remain. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan compares favorably to its neighbors on this count. The comparatively lower level of repression is itself a consequence of the lower level of threats perceived by the ruling elite. Secondly, following the debacle that its relationship with Uzbekistan had become, the United States moved quickly to retain whatever U.S. influence still remained in Central Asia. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, for instance, traveled

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Kanat Saudabayev, "Kazakhstan and the United States: Growing Partnership for Security and Prosperity," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 27, no. 3 (February 2005): 185–88; and Kassymzhomart Tokayev, "Kazakhstan: From Renouncing Nuclear Weapons to Building Democracy," *American Foreign Policy Interests* 26, no. 2 (April 2004): 93–97.

to Kyrgyzstan to save the Manas air base. Even more significant was Cheney's visit to Astana following on the heels of a long-expected invitation to Azerbaijan's president Ilham Aliyev to visit Washington. These events, culminating in Nazarbayev's Washington visit, signified the understanding of the United States that reaching out to semi-authoritarian leaders in the region was now necessary to preserve U.S. presence in the region; Kazakhstan was the major beneficiary of this realization.

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were both able to maintain such close ties to the United States only because the ruling elites felt secure enough not to allow fears of purportedly U.S.-sponsored color revolutions guide their thinking. Indeed, relatively stable domestic situations and popular regimes have been the primary factors leading these states to press for engagement with the United States. The benefits of engagement, in turn, allowed pro-Western forces in Astana as well as in Baku to prevail over pro-Russian forces in each government.

As noted above, the contrast between Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states is striking. Tashkent pursued a policy of balance between great powers in the negative sense of the term. Uzbek policies toward Moscow were harsh and confrontational, as were those of Georgia in the Caucasus. The sovereignty and independence of both states had been subjected to the most assertive Russian pressure in their respective regions. The failure of both states to build relations with Moscow nevertheless entailed dependence on another foreign power, in this case the United States. The Karimov government, however, failed to understand that U.S. support at the level needed to balance Russia would require Uzbek domestic reform—at least for U.S. domestic reasons, if nothing else. The Nazarbayev government, on the other hand, was able to portray itself as a more acceptable partner to the West. Kazakhstan sought to build a balance between great powers in the positive sense of the term. Friendly relations with the great powers did not come at the cost of compromise on issues of sovereignty and independence.

*The Others: Kyrgyzstan's Chaos, Turkmenistan's Neutrality, and Tajikistan's Belated Emergence*

In this sense, the foreign policies of the two heavyweights of Central Asia have evolved in opposing directions. The smaller states of the region face a more complicated situation because of their weakness and relative poverty. Turkmenistan, somewhat of an outlier, has chosen to ally with no one. This policy of positive neutrality aims for balance by avoiding the creation of a need to balance against any particular state. Three factors make this possible: an isolated geographic location, energy resources, and

the total control by the state over society. Isolation both from Russia and the major trouble-spots of southeastern Central Asia ensured that the security concerns of Turkmenistan were much less serious than those of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, or Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, maintaining positive relations with all Afghan governments (including the Taliban), as Ashgabat has, required considerable diplomatic skill. Energy resources and a small population have meanwhile enabled the Turkmen government to eschew regional economic cooperation and develop a more autarkic economy. Finally, the high level of repression in the country, exceeding even that of Uzbekistan, has ensured that few if any threats from society have emerged. Because Turkmenistan does not offer competitive elections, there has been little risk of a color revolution. It remains to be seen, however, whether the Turkmen leadership will be able to stick to a policy of neutrality. The death of eccentric ruler Saparmurad Niyazov in December 2006 and discord between other regional powers over Uzbek energy resources are both potentially destabilizing factors.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are in many ways similar: they are small, weak, mountainous, and contain sections of the Ferghana Valley. These states also face similar security challenges of Islamic radicalism, internal turmoil between stark regional divisions, and the rapidly growing problem of drug trafficking from Afghanistan that both strengthens violent non-state actors and criminalizes the state apparatus.<sup>69</sup> Naturally, there are important differences, however. Because of the border it shares with Afghanistan, Tajikistan is much more embroiled in Afghan affairs. Civil war has not only weakened the state severely but also provided the incumbent government with considerable latitude—the population will tolerate substantial excesses to avoid a renewed conflict. Tajikistan has become increasingly stable in recent years as a result. In Kyrgyzstan, on the other hand, erstwhile political stability evaporated early in the first decade of the 21st century, leaving little of the country's early mantle as the "Switzerland of Central Asia." Perhaps the weakest governing elite in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is constantly torn by infighting, enjoys little popular legitimacy, and faces a strong but undisciplined opposition split along regional lines.

In foreign policy the two countries have pursued a Russia-first approach stemming very much from their weakness and fear of potential threats emanating from Afghanistan and China. The Tajik government relied on support from Moscow to survive the civil war. Both current and

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<sup>69</sup> Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L. P. Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security," *Problems of Post-Communism* 53, no. 4 (July 2006): 10–28; and Erica Marat, *The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime, and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, Silk Road Paper, October 2006 (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006).

former elites in Kyrgyzstan meanwhile look to Moscow for protection—though Russia's help provided little solace for Akayev in the face of the Tulip Revolution. Nevertheless, even these weak states are unwilling to compromise on their sovereignty. The Kyrgyz government faces the most difficult situation, hosting the only remaining U.S. military base in Central Asia and a Russian base less than forty miles away. When Moscow and Beijing capitalized on the U.S.-Uzbek rift to end U.S. presence in Uzbekistan, the two also pressured the new president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, to evict the United States. Kyrgyz officials appeared to agree both to Russian demands that Kyrgyzstan expel U.S. troops and to Washington's demands to allow U.S. troops to remain as long as operations in Afghanistan warranted. Eventually, the Kyrgyz government pushed for a multifold hike in the rent paid by the United States for use of the base, obtained essentially through blackmail.

As for Tajikistan, the regime's growing sense of confidence has enabled it to branch out in its foreign relations. President Imomali Rakhmonov opened Tajikistan's first embassy in Washington and joined the Partnership for Peace in 2002. Though symbolic, these steps demonstrate a greater independence than had been apparent in the 1990s, when Tajikistan seemed little more than a Russian vassal in foreign policy matters. Moreover, Tajikistan has worked hard to develop ties with Asian countries. India, for one, has gained a military presence in the country.<sup>70</sup> Tajikistan has also shown greater assertiveness in dealings with Moscow regarding the Russian military presence in the country.

Both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are, despite their weakness, pursuing policies of balance. As Starr observes, however, these countries have done so in an ad hoc manner, never developing or implementing coherent strategies to guide their foreign policies. Instead, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan operate in a reactive manner, often improvising to maximize their gains.<sup>71</sup>

## Central Asia's Future and U.S. Interests

U.S. future relations with, and access to, Central Asia will largely depend on the ability to formulate a long-term strategy toward the region that incorporates and balances its three sets of interests in the region in a predictable and durable manner. The low ebb of current U.S. influence in Central Asia relates much to Washington's lack of a comprehensive and coordinated strategy. This lack of a clear strategy has enabled policies that

<sup>70</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "India Makes a Soft Landing in Tajikistan," *Asia Times*, March 3, 2007.

<sup>71</sup> Starr, "Kazakhstan's Security Strategy: A Model for Central Asia?" 13–14.

have tended to alienate Central Asian states and have undermined U.S. influence over the policy directions of these countries.

Of course, the Central Asian states themselves will play an important role in determining their bilateral relations with Washington—and in this context the maintenance of positive U.S. relations with Kazakhstan is of key importance. Though U.S. relations with Uzbekistan have the potential for further development, risks are also present. On the U.S. side, Washington's attention span is an important concern, especially given that the outcome of the upcoming presidential election could lead to a change in priorities. On the Kazakh side, in order to develop relations with the United States the government must check the temptation arising from the recent oil bonanza to stall reforms. The length of President Nazarbayev's tenure in power is another concern. As for Uzbekistan, a rapid restoration of the relationship to its previous level is difficult to imagine. A new administration in Washington or in Tashkent could make improved ties a greater possibility, though without the revision of fundamental elements of Uzbek domestic policy a good relationship is unlikely to develop.

Designing policies toward these and other Central Asian states will require a more nuanced view of the Central Asian political scene. Understanding the formal and informal structures in the policymaking environments of these states will be key. U.S. efforts to strengthen formal institutions will be necessary to keep the influence of unpredictable informal structures in check.

The waning of the color revolutions is a positive factor for the United States. Though beneficial for Georgia and Ukraine, these movements caused severe collateral damage to U.S. interests in Central Asia. Washington now has an opportunity both to re-calibrate the democracy promotion agenda to the strategic realities of the region and to mitigate the inadvertent counterproductive effects of policies over the past years. Shifting the emphasis to state-building efforts and to developing dialogue on a wide range of issues (though primarily the three discussed above) would go a long way toward this goal.

Engagement through the development of broad-based relations in multiple fields would provide the best course of action for the long-term strengthening of sovereignty, governance, and democracy. If Western governments view relations in different sectors as complementary rather than conflicting, relations in the energy and security spheres could have important and positive effects on internal reform in the states of the region. Increased energy and security cooperation can be used to develop tighter institutional and bilateral links between the Central Asian countries and the



United States. If used properly these links can in turn be used as a tool to nudge the states gradually in the direction of reform.

Clearly, interests in security or energy should not be allowed to stifle U.S. support for democratic and institutional reform in the region—yet neither should excessive demands for Central Asian countries to achieve overnight a level of democracy comparable to leading Western states at the expense of legitimate security and energy interests or the development of trade relations. It is in the interest of the United States to advance these three issues in parallel, without allowing one to take precedence over the other. Only by the simultaneous promotion of governance, energy, and security interests can the United States succeed in striking a balance among them and thereby contribute to its own security and development as well as to that of the countries of the region.