

Strategic concerns in Central Asia

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Over the past 16 years the international community has gone from seeing the independence of the Central Asian states as primarily a source of security threats to regarding the region as potentially a real strategic prize, despite its proximity to Afghanistan and the seemingly endless civil war and internal confusion there. Much of the change in perception comes from increased knowledge of the region's energy reserves.

The changes in the international community's assessment of the importance of the Central Asian states are also partly the result of a significantly altered global security environment. The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 brought about major changes in the ways in which the United States (US) exercised its global power. Since the planning of the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, Central Asia has become something of a priority for US military planners and policy makers. Moreover, US military action in Iraq has led to the shaking up of the status quo in much of the broader Middle East, including Iran and Turkey. It has also led to a worsening of relations between the Russian Federation and the United States and with Europe, where most countries (the United Kingdom obviously excluded) initially opposed the US-led invasion, but have subsequently refrained from public criticism of the war effort. Given this environment, the Central Asian states appear less fragile than they did in the first years of their independence.

The region may appear less fragile, but it continues to harbour serious long-term security risks. Geography as well as the drawing of state boundaries means that ethnic groups, resources and infrastructure are spread across borders. The newly independent states are of necessity highly interdependent, although, perhaps understandably, the leaders of the new states seem concerned more with state-building and short-term national interests than with region-wide cooperation and development. It will only be by enhanced regional cooperation, however, that the five Central Asian states will find solutions to their security problems. In addition to this, in all five states economic and political reforms are incomplete, which has resulted in a build-up of unsolved problems. Unfortunately, excluding efforts in the commercial sector, the international community's engagement has been fitful, with limited resources offered to help the Central Asians tackle the serious challenges the region faces.

Five independent states

The Central Asia region consists of five independent republics. Kazakhstan, by far the largest state in terms of territory, is politically perhaps the most stable. It also has the largest economy, with a range

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of natural resources (including oil and gas), a large agricultural sector and a number of oil and gas pipelines running through the country. It shares a border of over 7,000km with the Russian Federation. Uzbekistan, south of Kazakhstan and lying in the centre of the region, has the largest population in Central Asia (approximately 26 million people). It is seeking to develop its mineral and oil resources, but still depends heavily on cotton cultivation and the old Soviet-era centralized command economy. Politically it is one of the most authoritarian regimes in Central Asia, and it is its religious centre. Turkmenistan, west of Uzbekistan and sharing a border with Iran, is rich in oil and especially in gas. Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous state bordering China. It has some mineral resources (including gold), hydroelectric power and mixed agriculture. An early proponent of radical economic reform, Kyrgyzstan's foreign debt is roughly 80% of its gross domestic product¹ but the country's politicians have refused to accept heavily indebted poor country status because of the stigma attached to the label.² Finally, Tajikistan is the poorest of the Soviet Union successor states. It suffered a five-year civil war almost immediately after independence (1992–1997), has limited mineral resources and is highly indebted. It does have hydroelectric power potential and its border with Afghanistan means it may benefit from development efforts there—the United States is already funding the construction of a bridge between the two countries.

While all five states have undergone some economic and political reform since independence, most are still led by former Communist Party or economic figures and power remains resolutely in the hands of a few. Corruption is a problem throughout the region and this is compounded by the illegal narcotics trade: many states lie on transit routes for narcotics from Afghanistan.

SECURING STATEHOOD

When the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991 and Central Asian republics became independent and subject to international law, there was much concern within the international community about whether these countries would be able to transform themselves into fully sovereign states without endangering the security of their own citizens or the safety of those living in neighbouring states. This worry has not diminished over the past 16 years as a succession of crises seemed to threaten regional security, including the presence of Al-Qaeda-sponsored terror camps across the border in Afghanistan (which proved only a periodic annoyance in the form of small Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan forays into Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in an effort to spread its influence) and civil war in Tajikistan (which in fact never did flow beyond Tajikistan's borders).

Tajikistan has not been the only state to face internal security threats. In Uzbekistan, a demonstration in Andijon in May 2005 got far beyond authorities' control. Following a prison break to release local businessmen charged with being part of an extremist religious group—charges which many considered to be false—a large crowd gathered. The bulk of the demonstrators, though, seem to have gathered to protest their deteriorating living conditions. Government troops started shooting in an effort to take back control of a main square; over two hundred (there are no wholly reliable official or unofficial tallies) largely unarmed civilians were killed.

In Kyrgyzstan, President Askar Akayev was ousted by public demonstrations in the "Tulip Revolution" of March 2005. Since then, Kyrgyzstan remains in a kind of political limbo: efforts to rewrite the constitution and substantially weaken the powers of the president have been unsuccessful; Akayev's successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, has broken with most of his former fellow opposition leaders; pro-democracy elements are unhappy; and Bakiyev seems dependent on many of the "shadow", or illicit, Kyrgyz economic interests that abandoned Akayev in his last weeks in office, a crucial loss of support for the embattled leader.

This tight link between business interests—both legal and illegal—and the state is a significant concern throughout the region. Corruption is rife in Central Asia as members of ruling elites profit from foreign sales of natural resources, and in some places even from illegal drugs trafficking. While close ties between politicians and business ensure loyalty to the regime and therefore a degree of stability, any sign of weakness among those in power is likely to be seized upon by those competing for access to resources and by a frustrated population, creating a risk of violence in the struggle for political power.

So far, however, the region has weathered these storms intact, and while the states may not be strong, the sovereign statehood of all five countries now appears to be accepted by its neighbours. The border with China has been demarcated; all five Central Asian states as well as the Russian Federation have now agreed upon the borders with China, which is a positive break from the Soviet past. Additionally, troops from all these states have been moved well behind their respective border zones. The effort of demarcation even led to the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).³

Although Moscow may behave in a more paternalistic fashion toward the states than some of them may wish, there is fundamental acceptance of their sovereignty. Initially, many (including some of the leaders in the region) feared that the Russian Federation would turn the Central Asian states into a kind of new Warsaw Pact, with Russia controlling their economic and defence policies. This was a particular worry of the Kazakhs, given their enormous border with the Russian Federation and their population of approximately six million ethnic Russians at independence.

Relations with the Russian Federation

The Russian Federation at first expected to wield dominant influence over the Central Asian states.⁴ Almost all the countries now eager to insulate the Central Asians from what they view as potentially pernicious Russian influence were in the beginning quite content to see the Russian Federation help keep order in this region. Turkey and the United States were the only North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members to set up embassies in all Central Asian countries (although Turkey passed on Tajikistan, which is the only non-Turkic state). Most Western European states, meanwhile, were willing to set up a couple of embassies—in the case of Kazakhstan several countries originally shared a single building—while meeting their diplomatic obligations through their embassy in Moscow for the majority of states in the region. Tashkent (Uzbekistan) and Almaty (the capital of Kazakhstan until 1997, when Astana was founded) had the largest numbers of foreign envoys, and even today not all European Union (EU) members have direct representation in every Central Asian country.

The Russian Federation, of course, was obliged to engage the Central Asian states from the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In the first years, Moscow's preoccupation was with determining ownership, as all parties concerned tried to work out which of the Soviet communal assets belonged to Moscow and which were the possessions of the newly independent states.

Central Asia had been under Russian control since before the Soviet era, and the Russian leadership believed that this would likely continue. It seemed inconceivable to Kremlin policy makers that these five newly independent states were capable of exercising their sovereignty—Moscow held the purse strings for the entire region, supplying all the states with currency until 1993.

However, the challenges of creating a Russian state proved complex and consuming. What extra energy for foreign policy the Russian leaders had they applied in the Caucasus, which they saw as more of a core interest, and more closely tied to the deteriorating situation in Chechnya.

The decision by Moscow's financial reformers to cut the Central Asian republics loose from the ruble was primarily designed to help control Russia's escalating inflation. As long as Russia was providing currency to these states without setting their economic policies and foreign investment

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strategies, or controlling their hard currency reserves, it would not be able to control its inflation problems. But none of the Central Asian states (save war-torn Tajikistan) would accept such control over its policies. In 1993, Kyrgyzstan left the ruble zone. Then all left but Tajikistan, which continued to receive currency from the Russian Federation until 2000, after the civil war and the national reconciliation process had concluded. Ironically, Moscow's fiscal decision created the preconditions that essentially forced the Central Asian states to develop their own foreign economic strategies.

When the Russian Federation had regained internal stability (which did not really occur until after Vladimir Putin's presidency began in 2000), its leaders sought to exercise influence in Central Asia anew. But when Putin held his introductory meetings with his presidential counterparts in Central Asia he discovered a group of men far more confident in their ability to set their countries' international priorities than his predecessor Boris Yeltsin had encountered in meetings with virtually the same group of men. They were also a group with increasingly disparate interests and priorities.

The United States in Central Asia

Much of the United States' concern in Central Asia has been related to pipeline politics. The United States became drawn into the issue after Chevron had trouble working out problems in the construction of a pipeline from the Tengiz oilfield in western Kazakhstan across Russia to the port at Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, which began in 1992. The construction of this pipeline, owned and managed by the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (which includes Kazakh, Omani and Russian representation), was effectively a condition for Chevron to obtain the licence to develop Kazakhstan's Tengiz field, to which they first negotiated rights in the last years of Soviet rule. The pipeline was eventually built, opening in late 2001, but Tengizchevroil is having difficulty getting the Russian government, whose control of the Soviet-built pipeline system in Russia gives it monopoly transit power, to agree to expand capacity. Thus the notion of an alternative route for Kazakh oil and gas—one which does not cross Russia—remains very much alive for both the United States and gas customers in Europe.

For their part, Central Asia's leaders looked to the United States from the very first days of independence, hoping that Washington would take an interest and that the United States would somehow take to their cause in a fashion roughly analogous to their embrace of the former Warsaw Pact countries. They recognized that they would, by necessity of their shared geography (and their landlocked nature), maintain close ties to the Russian Federation, but each leader wanted to develop a unique international face for his country.

Although perhaps momentarily stunned by the speed of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, some Central Asian leaders like Uzbek premier Islam Karimov seemed to welcome it. Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev recognized that independence could bring special problems given that there was no natural geographical divide between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, and that ethnic Russians lived on both sides of the border. At first he worked hard to prevent the Soviet Union's collapse, but when dissolution proved inevitable, Nazarbayev moved to consolidate his position, and the independence of his country, very quickly. Nazarbayev was aided by the proactive posture of the United States, seemingly with strong personal pressure from Secretary of State James Baker, who travelled to several of the "orphaned" Soviet republics, including both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in mid-December 1991. Nazarbayev hosted the second "founding" of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 21 December 1991 in Almaty.⁵

Baker was particularly concerned to make sure that the Soviet Union's strategic nuclear arsenal (now physically located in Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, as well as the Russian Federation) was dismantled under United States or international supervision, or returned to the Russian Federation. Nazarbayev understood that this was a defining test for Kazakhstan; agreeing to disarm under US auspices would give it immediate international stature. Nuclear disarmament has remained a defining issue of Kazakhstan's foreign policy ever since, and was the building-block for a US–Kazakh strategic relationship that has weathered corruption cases revolving around Nazarbayev's personal finances and a sense in Washington that Kazakhstan could have done more to democratize its political system. The relationship has also withstood the United States' refusal to back Kazakhstan's bid to chair the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2009, which would make it the first CIS member state to hold this post. Washington, though, did support the postponement of the OSCE's decision for a year, to give Kazakhstan a chance to demonstrate a stronger commitment to political reform.

Baker's trip to Kyrgyzstan was a reward to Kyrgyzstan's founding president Askar Akayev for his seeming embrace of democratic principles. Akayev, a scientist with a background in Communist Party oversight of academia, had been seized with enthusiasm for political reform under Gorbachev, and was brought to power as head of the Kyrgyz parliament by a disgruntled and divided Kyrgyz party organization in October 1990. Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian state to leave the ruble zone, the first to agree to an economic macro-stabilization programme, and the first (and to date only) Central Asian country to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Yet, as discussed above, in early 2005 Akayev was ousted.

Akayev's removal dealt the greatest blow to US influence in the region. Some Central Asian and Russian leaders believed that Akayev's departure was the result of US support for pro-democracy groups in Kyrgyzstan. The success of the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine had already made the former Communist Party functionaries leading the Soviet successor states feel at risk from what they understood to be "machinations" in Washington. The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the events in Andijon, Uzbekistan in 2005 made all of Central Asia's leaders more willing to accept political advice from Kremlin strategists and even to engage in much more systematic security cooperation with Russia.

China's role in Central Asia

China's size and economic potential make it at least a silent presence in virtually every setting of importance involving the Central Asian states—and sometimes a visible and vocal one.

China's proportional economic presence is largest in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan sees itself as a gateway to China because both are members of the WTO. The Chinese already dominate much of light industry in Kyrgyzstan, especially in the north, and the Chinese represent virtually the only group eager to invest in that small and poor Central Asian country.

While the Kazakhs sometimes grumble about pressure from China, and the Chinese complain of bad business practices among their Kazakh partners, the two countries are cementing a longer-term relationship. China is a major investor in Kazakhstan's oil industry—to ensure increased access to Caspian oil and gas reserves. The Kazakhs and Chinese are also sponsoring a new joint 2,900km oil pipeline from Atyrau on the Caspian Sea to Alashankou on the Kazakh–Chinese border.

Beijing is also on the verge of becoming a rival to Moscow in Turkmenistan. Beijing and Ashkhabat have signed a long-term cooperation agreement for the development of greenfield gas projects in Turkmenistan. China has also secured transit rights to bring this gas across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan up to the Chinese border.

China is even interested in surplus electric power. Kazakhstan is planning a joint project with China to develop a US\$ 4 billion coal-fired power plant at Ekibastuz, near the Russian–Chinese border. Kyrgyzstan is also interested in selling hydroelectric power to China.

The Kazakhs and the Kyrgyz understand that the fates of their countries cannot be fully separated from that of China. Yet there is little indication that they have become more nervous of China in the past few years. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Both countries seem more comfortable in their ability to manage this relationship. But the relationship remains more problematic than the one with the Russian Federation, because China's potential economic power seems almost limitless, and the needs of its growing population could overwhelm those of the Central Asians. For the short term, however, China's posture toward the Central Asian states seems quite predictable and generally supportive. And the Chinese are likely to continue to offer loans to the region's poorer states. In other words, it seems that the Chinese will continue to proceed in Central Asia as they have for the last several years, with a strong sense of confidence that time is on their side, and that they are entering the region to stay.

Energy wealth

Central Asia's importance on the international stage stems primarily from its energy resources. Many of the issues affecting the region are being played out through the energy sector, not least the competition for strategic influence.

Perhaps less immediately or globally significant, but of considerable regional importance, is hydroelectric potential. Kyrgyzstan hopes to be able to develop an export-oriented hydroelectric power industry to substitute income from gold production, as its gold reserves are being depleted.

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The Kyrgyz and Tajiks, however, are competing for many of the same external investment funds in the hydroelectric sector, and Tajikistan's reserves are a better match with Afghanistan's needs—which is what much of development assistance is keen to supply.

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, respectively, have enough oil and gas to become serious "swing providers", compensating for shortfalls in Persian Gulf or Russian supplies. Much of Europe is seeking to reduce its dependence on the Russian Federation for energy, with the support of the United States, and China, India and much of the rest of East Asia are seeking to secure additional energy supplies, preferably not from the volatile Middle East.

The Russian Federation remains an important economic partner to all five Central Asian states, however, and still holds a monopolist or near-monopolist position in the export of Turkmen and Kazakh oil and gas reserves, given its control over the pipeline system that runs through its territory. The European Union and the United States remain convinced that this threatens the security of these states (and, more importantly, the security of Europe's gas supply).⁶ The opening up of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline, connecting Azerbaijan to Turkey and bypassing the Russian Federation, offers a new route for the shipment of Kazakh oil to Europe; it will travel by freight across the Caspian Sea to Baku once the Kashagan oilfield moves from the exploration phase to the exploitation phase. However, this is at present not scheduled to occur until 2010; five years late and with a much longer payback period due to monumentally higher than projected costs, which has increased ill-feeling in what was already a tense relationship between Kazakhstan and the Western oil consortium (led by Eni, but including Shell and ExxonMobil as well as Total as major partners).

In contrast to these problems with the European and US consortium, and difficulties over the expansion of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium notwithstanding, the Kazakhs have found it a bit easier to do business with the Russians in the past few years, and are pleased to be getting a higher price

for their gas (upward of US\$ 140 per 1000 cubic metres⁷). They also have hopes of collecting transit income for Turkmen gas, if a new pipeline along the Caspian coast is realized. This is a project between Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan, which was revived in May 2007. In addition, Kazakhstan hopes to receive transit income from a pipeline that would bring Turkmen gas to China.

China is eager to buy up as much of Central Asia's energy resources as possible and the Tajiks, Turkmen and Uzbeks are interested in taking advantage of the low-interest loans it has offered. The Kazakhs and Kyrgyz remain more wary of this traditional historic rival, who is viewed with more suspicion than the Russian Federation. But Chinese involvement in the Central Asian energy sector could create a more cooperative environment between two traditional rivals, the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks, both of whom benefit from transit fees created by the shipment of Turkmen gas across their territory.

Key security issues

MIGRATION

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are not just wary of the Chinese economy. They also fear an influx of Chinese settlers, and Kazakh and Kyrgyz nationalists are full of unsubstantiated stories of how this migratory process has already started.

The one migration, which occurs both legally and illegally, that no one can question is that of Central Asian workers. Remittances from workers abroad now make up an increasingly important source of income for the population of Kyrgyzstan; these workers find employment in both the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. Tajikistan's economy has also been heavily dependent upon remittances since its civil war, when Tajikistan not only lost most of its ethnic Russian population but also many Tajiks with connections in the Russian Federation. Most of this first group remained in Russia. After Russia's economy began its recovery, large numbers of additional Tajik workers began a kind of migratory trek. The more successful of them returned home once they had accumulated enough money to invest in small businesses, especially after 2000, when the new currency was introduced and the legal environment became more supportive of private investment, but many remain abroad.

Although the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc), whose members include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and most recently Uzbekistan, aspires to be a free trade zone, full employment rights throughout the "common" economic space have not been guaranteed. This means that the several million migrant workers who work year-round or seasonally in the Russian Federation remain at risk. If Russia were ever to close its doors to this labour force, as Russian nationalist groups regularly press for, then social pressures would increase in each of the Central Asian countries. Uzbekistan, whose economy remains very closed, and whose citizens work in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, would be particularly at risk.

The receiving countries—both Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation, even Kyrgyzstan—are wary of the potential security risks that the migrant labour population poses; risks to social stability in the localities in which they work; the risk of "importing" extremist religious ideology; or the risk of illegal drug trafficking or other forms of illicit trade.

THE ILLEGAL DRUGS TRADE

Central Asia is a key region for the trafficking of illegal drugs from Afghanistan. Tajikistan was the "bottleneck for drugs trafficking to the north" particularly before 11 September 2001.⁸ European, US and United Nations assistance programmes have since increased interdiction rates, and with better

controls here more drugs are instead passing from Afghanistan across other Central Asian countries and Iran.

A substantial amount of drug money was actually used to jump-start certain sectors of the economy in Tajikistan, and it undoubtedly helped support the revival of the home construction industry and the service sector more generally. The illegal drugs trade also seems to have helped ordinary Kyrgyz in southern Kyrgyzstan keep afloat, providing income to small traders who would otherwise have no livelihood. But in southern Kyrgyzstan in particular drug-based organized crime has overshadowed many forms of legal business, as drug barons have sought to become legitimate businessmen by buying up large amounts of commercial property. This has contributed to the bribery of politicians and voters and the general instability of political life.⁹

By contrast, in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan the drug trade seems to be more managed by government, which reaps financial rents from the trade. The one positive consequence of this is that the government maintains a hold over organized crime, so—unlike in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan—it lacks an independent source of financial power. Earnings from illegal drugs trafficking serve as another incentive for the ruling elite to remain loyal to the current regime and another impediment to economic reform.

RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

The Central Asian countries have been struggling to contain the political risks associated with religious extremism since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Islam began flourishing throughout Central Asia in the last years of Soviet rule, due to a relaxation of state management of culture and religion. Uzbekistan, the region's historic seat of Islamic learning, developed the most vibrant religious life in the region, ranging from a revival of Hanafi teachings (the dominant school of Islamic law in Central Asia) to the spread of more radical (locally termed "Wahhabist") forms of Islam. The Uzbek government began cracking down on the latter in the mid-1990s, fearing that religious ferment could contribute to the breakdown of secular political institutions (as it was doing in neighbouring Tajikistan during its civil war). While many radical Islamists fled the country to fight in Tajikistan and then in Afghanistan, other radical groups, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir, began to spread their ideology.

The question of what does or does not pose a threat to security can be very subjective. Some extreme members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir seem prepared to entertain the possibility of using force to advance their goals. The majority of the organization, however, is focused on using peaceful means to spread its message, a message that is by definition seditious as it seeks to undermine the secular nature of the state. Europe and the United States do not always see eye to eye with their Central Asian, Chinese or Russian colleagues over what constitutes religious extremism, or what constitutes an appropriate response. In Central Asia, the concern of Europe and the United States is not so much the banning of groups like Hizb-ut-Tahrir—many of which are no longer able to operate freely in parts of Western Europe either—but rather the way in which those accused of illegal religious activities are treated in the region, most particularly in Uzbekistan, but also to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The main focus of attention is the use of torture to extract confessions and more generally the lack of due process. Western observers from non-governmental organizations, governments and academia argue that these practices increase support for radical religious groups, increasing the security risk. Central Asian governments maintain that they are necessary to meet the extraordinary threats that their societies face, and they claim that there is a double standard being applied in the "war on terror"—where Western democracies are permitted to take extreme actions and they are not.

In fact, it is very likely that the terrorist potential of these various groups is much lower than that of cells of jihadis in Spain or the United Kingdom, which in recent years have seen terrorist-inspired

violence on a much greater scale than has been seen in Central Asia. Unlike in Central Asia, however, these incidents did not call into question the legitimacy of the state, which did occur in the aftermath of the Andijon disturbances in Uzbekistan, and which Central Asian elites fear could occur in the event of subsequent religious-inspired disturbances. There are remnants of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan that have the capacity to infiltrate back into the region and it would not be difficult for fringe groups to develop the capacity for armed action.

Regional cooperation on security

Many issues threatening the security of Central Asian states are region-wide: migration, radical Islam, illegal narcotics trafficking, and even potential conflicts over the ways in which natural resources, most particularly hydroelectric power, are developed. But to date, despite all the talk of the need for effective forms of regional cooperation, no effective solution has been found to make the five states of the region subordinate national concerns to overarching regional ones.

Four of the five Central Asian states are members of the Moscow-sponsored Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Only Turkmenistan, due to its avowed doctrine of "positive neutrality" is not a member, although this could change as Niyazov's successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov reconsiders the country's foreign policy stance. The CSTO states have also increased their security cooperation under the aegis of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, engaging in joint military exercises of unprecedented scale in 2007, which focused on recapturing a small city from the control of terrorists. However, these exercises were dominated by China and Russia, and Uzbekistan refused to do more than send an observer mission, leaving few in the region confident that the SCO will emerge as an effective source of a coordinated multilateral military response.

These activities have not precluded the Central Asian states' continued membership of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme and their engagement in various bilateral relationships and training projects with NATO member states. The United States still has an airbase in Kyrgyzstan, although there is growing public pressure for its removal—some claim that this is likely being instigated by various political elements in the Russian Federation. The Germans were able to remain in Uzbekistan even after the United States was asked to leave and NATO forces have some limited basing facilities in Tajikistan as well.

While the states of Central Asia are eager to remain on good terms with Washington as well as Brussels and Europe's national capitals, the heyday of US military influence in the region, and likely that of NATO as well, does seem to have passed, at least for the foreseeable future. While the Central Asian states are likely to continue to look to the West as their preferred source of technical assistance as they continue to reform their militaries, their political shift away from the West and increased security cooperation with the Russian Federation may in fact result in reduced access for the purposes of intervention and even for timely and useful advice regarding whatever security threats the region may find itself confronting.

The Central Asian states no longer view themselves as sharing an extensive list of security goals with NATO countries. From a Central Asian perspective, the Russian Federation's ambitions appear containable for now, especially since continued EU and US pressure is likely to keep Moscow paying commercially competitive prices for their gas; and China's potentially hegemonic behaviour seems a long way off. Most important, both China and the Russian Federation share the Central Asian leaders' sense of what is and what is not good statecraft, and do not accuse them of advancing policies that create the very security risks that all agree must be alleviated.

The Central Asian states have each managed their relations with the major international actors relatively well, but they have done far less well creating any sort of durable formula for regulating

relations with one another. Right now there are no major rifts threatening to boil over, but should there be a weaker ruler in Tashkent, or a stronger one in Dushanbe, long-standing rivalries could become very problematic. As it is, Uzbek suspicion of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (as well as of Turkmenistan, with whom it shares access to water) seriously diminish the likelihood that a region-wide free trade regime will develop in the region. Moreover, the relative lack of tensions in the Uzbek–Kazakh relationship is also partly the product of personality, through long years of forced close association between Islam Karimov and Nursultan Nazarbayev. However, it is very hard to predict what the coming to power of a new generation, particularly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, will mean for the region as a whole. Right now Nazarbayev in particular serves as something of a stabilizing force, enjoying the respect of the younger leaders in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. In the absence of strong regional cooperative mechanisms, it will be difficult for any of the new generation to become a force for stability, and few in Central Asia will be eager to defer to Chinese, EU, Russian or US pressure to play such a role.

Notes

1. "Kyrgyz Asked to Chip in to Repay State Debt", *Reuters*, 1 August 2007, at <uk.reuters.com/article/oddlyEnoughNews/idUKL0183745620070802>.
2. "Kyrgyz Government Rejects IMF Debt-Relief Scheme", *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, 20 February 2007.
3. Created in 1996 and initially called the Shanghai Five, the organization comprised China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation and Tajikistan. In 2001 it became the SCO and Uzbekistan joined. It has since taken on an expanded security mission to identify common threats and coordinate a cooperative response in dealing with them.
4. The so-called Kozyrev Doctrine, a foreign policy concept officially adopted in April 1993, dictated that the main goal of Russian foreign policy was to create "a belt of security" around Russia's borders. This document put forward a number of priorities for Russian foreign policy in Central Asia, including Russian primacy as a conflict mediator within the CIS, guaranteeing the rights of Russian citizens in the near abroad, and establishing Russia's place as the first among equals in military, economic and political multilateral frameworks in Central Asia. (See Alexander A. Sergounin, 1998, *Russia: A Long Way to the National Security Doctrine*, Copenhagen Peace Research Institute, March.)
5. The founding of the CIS was first agreed by the leaders of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine on 8 December 1991, but this was deemed a constitutional coup by Mikhail Gorbachev, as the Soviet Union was still in existence. This second founding in Almaty was attended by ten of the Soviet Union's constituent states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan), and represented the official creation of the CIS. Azerbaijan and Georgia have since joined. Turkmenistan left in 2005.
6. The European Commission estimates that the EU's dependence on natural gas imports will increase from 57% to 84% by 2030 (European Commission, no date, *Gas: Security of Gas Supply*, at <ec.europa.eu/energy/gas/sos/index_en.htm>). This has prompted a great deal of nervousness among European governments about the security of their energy supply and the desire among some in European circles to diversify the EU's sources of energy and means of transport.
7. "Kazakhstan's Growing Gas Exports to Go Russia's Way", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 17 May 2007.
8. UN Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, 2000, *Global Drug Report 2000*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 8.
9. Nine states were at 142nd place (out of 163) on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index of 2006. Three of these were in Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.