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The Relations between Central Asian States and United States, China and Russian within the Framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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Abstract

This paper will examine the development of United States (U.S.), Chinese and Russian presence in Central Asia since the 1990s and the Central Asian states' response to their actions. Also, it will discuss whether the Central Asian states joined the The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) merely to appease their powerful neighbors China and Russia or whether these small states have had an impact on the SCO, its agenda and direction.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to study further the interests and relations of the Central Asian states with the major powers seeking influence in the region – China, Russia and the United States, to explore whether the relationship of the Central Asian states with Russia and China prevent them from developing into true democratic states, with free and fair elections, rule of law, basic human rights and freedoms, and whether the SCO agenda in Central Asia complements or contradicts U.S. policy in the region.

It may appear that the Central Asian states, which are comparatively small and poor, are merely bandwagoning with the much more powerful members: China and Russia. Indeed, as geopolitics and geo-economics play a role in the triangle of Russia, China, and U.S. relations, the Central Asian states have certain bargaining power and have been balancing the three major powers effectively.

Significance of the Central Asian Region

It is evident from the economic overview that neither Central Asia's population, of about fifty five million people, nor its economic capacity, with a total GDP of about \$62.43 billion, represents a considerable impact on the world. However, its energy resources are clearly significant and its location is strategically important. Located at the center of Eurasia on the intersection of critical transport routes, Central Asia represents a strategic component of the Eurasian continent. These four former Soviet republics of Central Asia serve as a bridge between East and West.¹ As a special report from *The Economist* noted:

They are flanked to the east by a rising great power (China); to the North by their former hegemon (Russia); to the south by a country collapsed in violent chaos (Afghanistan), a fundamental Islamic republic (Iran), and a fragile secular state in search of a greater regional role (Turkey). Along with these, a distant superpower seeks influence, if not dominance (US).²

Indeed, since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack in the United States, the Bush administration has viewed the Central Asian states, particularly Uzbekistan, as vital partners in the American-led "Global War on Terrorism". Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian country to offer the use of its bases, which are far more modern and secure than the bases at Bagram and Kandahar in Afghanistan, where more than two decades of war have left them less suitable for twenty first-century airborne military missions. Moreover, Central Asia is a major transit route for opium from Afghanistan to Russia and Western Europe. Furthermore, Central Asia has the leftovers of military industries of the former Soviet Union that could easily get into the hands of terrorist or rogue states.

Finally, the abundance of untapped energy resources has attracted the attention of China, Russia, the European Union, and the United States, although the Central Asian oil and gas are useless unless they can be brought to the market, a difficult challenge in an entirely landlocked part of the world. Hence, it is the route of potential export pipelines that will most likely determine regional alignments and outside influence. For decades, Russia has controlled most export routes, and thus has a stranglehold in the region; but as China, the European Union and the United States bring significant investments to fund transit and transport infrastructure, Russia's influence is challenged. Many analysts, in fact, have proposed that a new "Great Game" is taking place in this region, with the major players being China, Russia and the West.

The Establishment of the SCO

The SCO stemmed out of its predecessor, the Shanghai Five forum, which convened in 1996 at the initiative of China with the purpose of settling the border disputes with the newly independent former Soviet republics of Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In contrast to the SCO, the Shanghai Five was a very straightforward group that achieved its initial goals. At the first Shanghai Five Summit in April of 1996, the five member nations developed security confidence-building measures in the border areas before the final resolution of the border problems.³

Following this summit, China and Kyrgyzstan signed a border agreement in July 1996, which was ratified in 1999 and finally approved by the Kyrgyz parliament in 2002, thus settling problems along the approximately 1,000 kilometer long border between them.⁴ By the year 2000, the Shanghai Five members agreed to deepen multilateral cooperation in the spheres of regional security, politics, economics and trade. Moreover, at the Dushanbe summit, where Uzbekistan participated as an observer for the first time, they signed a declaration endorsing China's and Russia's positions on a multi-polar world, an Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty, and opposed the United States' plan to build a National Missile Defense system in the Asia Pacific region. In addition, they vowed to defend the goals and principles of the United Nations Charter, and reiterated that countries have the right to choose political, economic and social development models according to conditions in their respective nations. In 2001, China and Tajikistan successfully concluded an agreement that permanently settled the remaining disputes along their common borders, and Uzbekistan gained membership at the SCO.⁵

The organization expected to be an example of a new type of organization vowing to promote a new international political and economic order, featuring democracy, justice and rationality. However, the organization continues to be shrouded in mystery and full of contradictions and controversies. Every year the SCO gains more attention from the West, especially with the start of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan and with the rising interests from other countries in the region to join. During 2004 and 2005, Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran became observers in the organization. The Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad attended the Shanghai summit in 2006, there has been speculation that Iran might join the SCO. In March 2008, Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki officially announced Iran's bid, saying Tehran had submitted a request for full membership to the SCO Secretariat. Belarus, Nepal and Sri-Lanka have expressed their intention as observers. Russian foreign minister Vitaly Vorobyov even once commented that Afghanistan may be granted observer

status in the Organization.⁶ Also, there has been some talk of the possible inclusion of Turkmenistan, if the country wishes to join.

Important common aim of SCO members is to ranging from mutual security, fighting terrorism and separatism, defending regimes from west- inspired upheavals to economic cooperation. One may indeed get the impression of an emerging alliance and powerful factor in world politics.

Great Power Policy and Actions in Central Asia

In 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a number of powers – China, the European Union, Iran, Turkey, and the United States (U.S.) – made inroads into a newly opened Central Asia. Among these powers, China and the United States became most influential and Russia re-emerged in the mid 1990s after a short absence. Throughout the 1990s, Central Asian hydrocarbon reserves, concentrated mostly in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, sparked a great deal of initial interest among the U.S. business and policy making circles. As significant as these reserves may be, their impact on the global energy stage was projected to be marginal at over three percent of the world's oil reserves⁷. Moreover, the difficulties associated with the construction of export routes coupled with the low price of oil by the late 1990s somewhat diminished U.S. interest in Central Asian hydrocarbons. Authoritarian governance, struggling economies and corruption were prevalent throughout the region and Central Asia was viewed increasingly as a region at risk of destabilization. In 1997, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott defined U.S. interests in the region as economic development, democratic reform, conflict prevention and the establishment of a zone free from great power influence and competition.⁸ In 2001, U.S. policy goals regarding Central Asian hydrocarbon reserves included “supporting their sovereignty and ties to the West, supporting U.S. private investment, breaking Russia's monopoly over oil and gas transport routes by encouraging the building of pipelines that do not traverse Russia, and promoting Western energy security through diversified suppliers.”⁹ Therefore, the United States, together with the European Union, established the Baku- Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Company (BTC) in 2002. The pipeline, hosted by Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, has become a major step in the opening of a new export route for Caspian Basin oil resources to the western European markets.¹⁰ The objectives of the BTC pipeline, according to U.S. officials, is to reduce dependence on OPEC oil producers in the Middle East, create a secure supply of oil to Israel, and, most importantly, begin to and dependence on Russian and Iranian oil transportation networks from the Caspian region. After long hesitation as to the impact of this decision on relations with Russia,

Kazakhstan finally committed to joining the BTC pipeline in 2006, but stated that it would be modestly involved. Additionally, U.S. private companies hold stakes at Tengiz and Karachaganak oil fields in Kazakhstan. The United States is now promoting a future gas transit project: the Trans-Afghan Pipeline.

Furthermore, U.S. trade with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan increased at a steady pace. Tajik exports to the United States increased some 200 times from just \$1.2 million in 2002 to \$241 million in 2005, while U.S. exports to Kyrgyzstan nearly tripled rising from around \$27 million to more than \$71 million by 2006.¹¹ In the interest of protecting American investments in Central Asia, the United States invited these nations to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Partnership for Peace (PfP) initiative and conducted training exercises in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1997 aiming to insure stability and security in the region. Finally, the United States has been providing economic aid to Central Asian states since their independence. However, there has been a decline, since 2002, mainly due to the United States diminishing military actions in Afghanistan, and also due to the Central Asian states' lack of progress in democratic and economic reform, and continued human rights violations.

As the result of the September 11 terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan, the strategic interests of the United States in the area increased tremendously¹². The U.S. anti-terror campaign initially met with a great deal of support from the Central Asian states. Even though the populations of these countries are predominantly Muslim, the governments, with the exception of Tajikistan, are fiercely secular and have themselves been battling Islamic extremism. In Tajikistan, because of considerable influence wielded by the Islamic Renaissance Party in domestic politics, President Rakhmon had to proceed cautiously with participation in any anti-terrorism alliance that was targeting Islamic extremism.¹³

Nevertheless, all Central Asian leaders condemn terrorist activities, and thus saw this campaign as a way to combat internal and regional religious extremism as well as to use it as an excuse for oppression of opposition movements. In 2001, Uzbekistan offered the use of the Karshi-Khanabad airbase, also known as K2, located 145 kilometers from the Afghan border and two hours' flying time to it, where at least 1,500 American soldiers were stationed throughout the lease of the base.¹⁴ The arrival of the Americans was also welcomed by the local population, as the base became a key employer, at the highest point providing about 3,000 jobs for local residents, mainly for maintenance and construction.¹⁵ However, shortly after the arrival of U.S. troops, many problems arose such as withholding of a portion of their

wages by the Uzbek companies responsible for hiring local workers, humiliating body searches, especially of women, by the Uzbek Secret Services, loss of access to farming fields near the airbase, and barbed wire fences and military checkpoints that diminished access to the village. Nevertheless, local residents of Khanabad possessed a generally positive view of the American military presence and blamed the Uzbek officials for these problems. In 2001, Tajikistan also agreed to allow the United States to evaluate three former Soviet airbases for potential use by U.S. aircraft to support military operation in Afghanistan, however the United States decided that these facilities lacked good roads into Afghanistan, so they were used for emergency landings and occasional refueling.¹⁶

Additionally, the United States secured rights to use Tajik airspace for humanitarian and search-and-rescue missions. In 2002, Kyrgyzstan, allowed Canadian, French and American air forces to use the Ganci airbase at Manas International Airport, which is 1,500 kilometers or a three-hour flight from Kandahar, Afghanistan. Here, 1,000 U.S. and an equal number of coalition forces are stationed. Kazakhstan has also granted overflight rights to the United States for anti-terrorism activities in Afghanistan. The Global War on Terrorism also provided new areas for cooperation among China, Russia and the United States in dealing with the Islamic world, counter-terrorism, international drug trade, and weapons proliferation. China changed its tactics towards the United States by toning down its “anti-hegemon” rhetoric and was seeking a more cooperative and constructive relationship with Washington with counter-terrorism as a central theme.¹⁷ If prior to the September 11 terrorist attack the United States was sympathetic towards the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang and criticized China for human rights abuses, after the attacks the United States reevaluated its position. As links between Uyghur separatist groups and Al-Qaeda were exposed in 2001, the United States added the Uyghur separatist movement to its list of terrorist organizations. China, Russia, and the United States together with the Central Asian states became united in their effort to fight Islamic extremism and terrorism. Although the United States shared similar interests in combating terrorism in Central Asia, as did the SCO, there has not been much cooperation between it and the organization. According to many analysts and scholars, this is due to the fact that not only do China and Russia see the SCO as a tool for balancing the U.S. hegemonic power, but also because the United States prefers unilateralism and has been dealing with the Central Asian states on a bilateral basis.¹⁸

Furthermore, analysts suggested that as the world’s single superpower, the United States has a global strategy to prevent the emergence of a state or bloc of states that may threaten its hegemonic position, hence any rising opposition led by Russia or China in an

international organization was likely to be a concern.¹⁹ In September 2007, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Evan Feigenbaum said that the United States did not understand what the SCO was and what it did. Although the September 11 terrorist attacks opened doors for improvement in China-U.S. relations, differences between them remained. First, the U.S. led anti-terror campaign further legitimized its global leadership and strengthened its hegemonic position. Second, China worried that improvements in U.S.-Russia and U.S.-Central Asia relations would negatively impact its efforts for promoting a multi-polar world order.²⁰

Finally, Beijing feared the U.S. attempts to encircle it strategically by securing alliances and partnerships with Central Asian states.²¹ Clearly, permanent U.S. military presence in Central Asia was not welcomed by China. U.S.-Russian relations also experienced improvement as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks. First, in October 2001, Russia and the United States conducted the first ever consultations on Central Asia considering these were significant shared interests in this region, such as long-term stability and economic prosperity in Central Asia.²² Russia has shared intelligence, provided search-and-rescue assistance, supported international humanitarian relief efforts, and did not obstruct the Central Asian states' decision to accept U.S. military presence on their national territories.²³ Second, this association helped to offset China's growing influence, as Russia was not able to compete with Chinese economic and incentive packages. At the same time, Russia was certainly uncomfortable with long-term U.S. occupation of military bases in its sphere of influence, i.e., Central Asia. Initially, U.S. political and military leaders indicated that American forces would stay only as long as the regional terrorism threat remained. However, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's 2004 February visit to Uzbekistan provided insight into the Bush administration's strategic vision. Emphasizing that "no final decisions" had been made, Rumsfeld indicated that the United States wanted to establish the so-called "operating sites" in Asia. As it became apparent that the United States planned to keep a long-term military presence in Central Asia, China and Russia sought ways to oust the former from Central Asia. Western criticism and requests for independent investigation of the Andijon massacre of 2005 in Uzbekistan was a turning point in U.S.-Central Asia relations. At the SCO summit in July 2005, Central Asian leaders' frustrations were aired: President Nazarbaev said, "There should be no place for interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states" and President Karimov said that "outside forces were threatening to hijack stability and impose their model of development on Central Asia."²⁴ Subsequently, the United States was asked to set a deadline to withdraw its troops from the bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. According to Martha

Olcott, this SCO resolution was probably drafted during Karimov's trip to China, immediately following the Andijon events, at a point when he had decided to distance himself from the United States.²⁵ Most importantly, Central Asian leaders believed the West and the United States, in particular, were behind the color revolutions and other movements to topple their regimes. Indeed, one of the U.S. goals for the region – democracy building – was in direct contradiction to the Central Asian leaders' interests because they saw political liberalization as the end of their regimes. Consequently, in November 2005, the United States completed a withdrawal of its troops from Uzbekistan, but was able to continue to use Ganci airbase in Kyrgyzstan, albeit with a rent increase, largely due to Kyrgyzstan's dependence on foreign economic assistance that comprises nearly seventeen percent of country's GDP.²⁶

The Chinese presence in Central Asia is visible largely through trade, energy deals, building up of infrastructure in Western China and linking it up with Central Asia and through the gradual enlargement of the scope of the SCO, especially in the security area. Since the early 1980s, China has been focusing its efforts on internal economic development and thus has gradually developed a foreign policy with two outstanding characteristics: peace and independence.²⁷ In 2001, the Chinese leadership introduced a "new security concept", i.e., that security should be obtained by peaceful means and through multilateral security dialogue and cooperation.²⁸ Consequently, initially the SCO was focused on security issues such as eradicating Central Asia-based insurgents and militant Islamists and, more importantly, China's own Uyghur separatist movement with the cooperation of the Central Asian leaders.²⁹ For Beijing, the SCO has become a model for multilateral cooperation and a way to counter U.S. unilateralism.

Economically, China has been eyeing Central Asian energy resources ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but only one major deal was made in the 1990s. In 1997 Kazakhstan and China agreed to build a 998-kilometer long pipeline from Atasu to Xinjiang designed to carry ten million tons of oil annually. The year 2005 proved to be pivotal in China-Central Asia relations with the American departure from the military base in Uzbekistan and China National Petroleum Corporation's acquisition of PetroKazakhstan (China's first foreign energy takeover).³⁰ According to the Kazakh Energy and Natural Resources Minister Baktykozha Izmukhambetov, "Chinese companies operating in Kazakhstan currently [2006] account for twelve percent of hydrocarbon production in the country. That figure is expected to rise sharply in the near future."³¹ Currently, there are plans for a Chinese-Kazakh pipeline to be linked with Iran, bringing even more of the Caspian oil to

western China. In 2007, China plans to invest about \$2 billion in Uzbekistan, with \$600 million going to the oil and gas sector.³²

In Tajikistan, China made a \$600 million loan for construction of two hydroelectric stations in the Khatlon region and a tunnel under the Shar-Shar Pass on the road connecting Dushanbe and Kuljab. China is also investing in Tajik light industry.³³ China has expressed interest in investing in Kyrgyzstan's hydropower industry, and Kyrgyz electricity is already being delivered to western China. Overall levels of trade between Central Asian states and China have grown from \$1 billion in 1997 to \$9.8 billion in 2005, a nearly ten-fold increase in eight years. All of these actions show a sign of China's increasing interests and influence in Central Asia, which also cuts into Russia's dominance, especially in the Central Asian energy sector.³⁴

Russia's extensive presence in Central Asia can be explained by the Soviet legacy. During the Soviet period, Central Asia was Moscow's natural resource provider. Thus their infrastructure is very much interconnected.³⁵ Indeed, until the beginning of 2000 all of the oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia were northbound, giving Russia considerable influence in the region. Furthermore, the Central Asian states did not have large standing armies of their own and relied on Russia for most of their security needs.³⁶ For instance, Tajikistan's foreign minister Hamrokhon Zarifi stated at a conference in 2007: "Russia was, is, and will remain our strategic partner and ally. We have commitments to each other, and, on our part, we will strictly fulfill them."³⁷ Indeed, Russia provided Tajikistan with a "peace-keeping" unit (the 201st Motorized Division) during its civil war of 1992-1997. In 2003, the Russian unit became a regular military force at the Kulyab airbase. Russian troops are also stationed at Kant base in Kyrgyzstan under a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) agreement. Moreover, in 2005, after the Andijon massacre, Russia and Uzbekistan signed an alliance treaty and in 2006 Uzbekistan joined the Russia-dominated CSTO, thus shifting back towards Russia. Like China, Russia has also been pushing for a multi-polar world order, which it has been promoting partly through the CSTO. At the 2002 CSTO meeting the Russian president stated his approval of a cooperative relationship between the new CSTO and NATO in order to form a new global security system.³⁸ This position was reconfirmed in February of 2007 by Moscow's proposal on joint NATO-CSTO stabilization actions in Afghanistan.³⁹ Despite what Zbigniew Brzezinski describes as Russia's "imperial nostalgia,"⁴⁰ there has been a new economically driven pragmatism in Moscow's foreign policy making, particularly since Putin's rise to power.⁴¹ Thus, Russia's closer military ties with Central Asia are partially a way of securing its investments in this volatile region. In 2004 Russia pledged to invest \$2

billion in hydropower facilities and modernization of the aluminum plant, TadAz, in Tajikistan.⁴² Kazakh oil runs through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), the 1,580-kilometer pipeline connecting the Tengiz oil field in western Kazakhstan with the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk, Russia. Moreover, taking advantage of the strained Uzbek-American relations, in 2006 Russia's Gazprom, Uzbekneftegaz, and KazMunayGaz signed an agreement on gas supply and transit. Gazprom also expressed an interest in acquiring a forty four percent stake in Uzbektransgaz.⁴³

Additionally, since 1999, the issue of anti-terrorism became a top priority for Russia, as it has been fighting a separatist movement in Chechnya since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Following the First Chechen War (1994-1996), Chechnya gained *de facto* sovereignty, and received support from Central Asia's IMU, China's Uyghur separatists and Afghanistan's Taliban government, who was the only nation to recognize its independence. Although Russia regained control of the republic after the Second Chechen War (1999-2000), unrest remains an issue. Subsequently, Russia has sought closer ties with the Central Asian states to break the connection between the Chechen separatists and the Central Asian militant Islamists and the Uyghur separatists.

Central Asian States Foreign Policies

Since the early 1990s, the Central Asian states inherited a variety of problems from the Soviet period and developed many new ones with the dissolution of the USSR. In the face of these old and new problems, the Central Asian states astutely chose to pursue multidirectional foreign policies and sought to develop good relations with China, the European Union, Russia, the United States and other nations, concurrently, in order to maximize their gains from each relationship. In other words, the Central Asian states tried to develop balanced relations with China and Russia on one hand, through their membership in the SCO, and the West and other states on the other, through bilateral relations.

In his 2007 state address to the nation, President Nazarbaev stated that Kazakhstan's foreign policy remains multifaceted and balanced, which is manifested in good neighborly relations with Russia and China and strategic partnerships with the United States and multilateral cooperation with the European Union.⁴⁴ Currently, Kazakhstan, which has traditionally been Russia's ally, sided with the United States on the invasion of Iraq and even sent twenty-nine soldiers from its peacekeeping battalion, KAZBAT, to serve under Polish command in Iraq, where they performed demining and water purification missions. Presently, Kazakhstan has replaced Uzbekistan as a U.S. strategic partner in Central Asia. During his

2006 visit to Kazakhstan, U.S. Vice President Richard Cheney said: “I am proud to affirm the strong ties between Kazakhstan and the United States. We have great respect, Mr. President, for all that you have accomplished in the last fifteen years. And we are proud to be your strategic partner.”⁴⁵ Cheney also praised Kazakhstan for being a regional leader in political and economic reform.

Furthermore, as Kazakhstan was seeking to raise its own prestige as an energy supplier and to be considered as an independent international player rather than merely a post-Soviet state or one of the “stans”, it began to break its dependency on Russian oil and gas routes. In April 2007, Kazakhstan expressed interest in joining a proposed \$6 billion gas pipeline project, which will run 3,400 kilometers across the Caspian Sea and was scheduled to be built beginning in 2008 and go on stream in 2011. The project will transport Central Asian gas to Europe bypassing Russia, and thus reducing risks of disruption.⁴⁶ At the same time, President Nazarbaev stressed “Kazakhstan had never acted against Russia’s interests while working with the United States, or against the U.S. and Europe while working with Russia and China.”⁴⁷ He had stressed that energy transport decisions were made purely based on economic grounds: “If it is advantageous to transport oil through Russia, we will go in this direction. If we feel that transportation through Baku-Ceyhan is \$15 cheaper, we will follow that direction. And if both options turn difficult, we will reach out to China”.⁴⁸ Furthermore, Kazakh officials have been amending their multidirectional approach by developing foreign policies and relations towards smaller states, such as Slovakia and Qatar, as well as major powers. Lastly, President Nazarbaev wants to boost his nation’s international prestige through participation in the SCO, the establishment of the Single Economic Unit in Central Asia and through engagement with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which Kazakhstan has been nominated for chairmanship in 2009.

In 2007, Kyrgyz President Bakiev also approved a new “multi-vectored, balanced and pragmatic foreign policy based on its national interests,”⁴⁹ a foreign policy concept, with the goals of strengthening national security and Kyrgyzstan’s positive image in the international arena. However, according to experts, the new policy is very similar to former President Akaev’s policy, with perhaps better-defined relations with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan’s new foreign policy focuses on three dimensions of cooperation – regional, continental and global.⁵⁰ Regional cooperation implies strengthening of relations with neighboring Central Asian countries and regional organizations such the CSTO, SCO, CIS, and EurAsEC. However, thus far, Kyrgyzstan has been unsuccessful in securing close cooperation with its immediate neighbors on border and water distribution issues, which

remain unresolved. Consequently, Kyrgyzstan is still negotiating border delimitation with all neighboring countries except China, although in an interview with RFE/RL in August 2007, Kyrgyzstan foreign minister, Ednan Karabaev, said that his country is ready for compromise. Also, there has been improvement in economic ties with Kazakhstan. Kazakh investment in the Kyrgyz economy has doubled since 2004, reaching \$200 million, making Kazakhstan “the number one investor”⁵¹ in Kyrgyzstan. In July 2007, the two nations also agreed to set up a Joint Investment Fund, for which Kazakhstan would initially contribute \$100 million and Kyrgyzstan \$20 million.⁵² Continental cooperation implies deepening relations with Russia, the United States, the European Union, China, Japan, Turkey, India, Pakistan, South Asian and Arab countries. This new policy continues to treat Russia as a strategic partner, while seeking active cooperation with the United States in the war against international terrorism, trade and economic development, and military-technical cooperation. Even though U.S.-Kyrgyz relations suffered some setbacks in 2006, including the killing of a Kyrgyz citizen by an American serviceman at the Ganci airbase, and a collision between a departing Kyrgyz passenger aircraft and an American tanker plane that caused a reported \$3 million in damages.⁵³ Kyrgyzstan continues to host two foreign airbases within its territory – the Russian base at Kant and the American base at Ganci. Kyrgyzstan plans to continue its global engagement through active membership in the United Nations. In 1998, Kyrgyzstan was the first among the former soviet republics, and, to this day, the only Central Asian country to join the WTO.

Tajikistan foreign policy also is multifaceted with Russian relations being the most important ones. Tajik President Rakhmon reiterated so in his 2001 declaration: The development of friendly relations, cooperation and integration with the member countries of the common wealth of independent states will remain a firm priority of the foreign policy of Tajikistan. The further development of all-round relations with the Russian Federation meets the national interests of Tajikistan and we shall try to have stable strategic and friendly relations with the Russian Federation in the future as well.⁵⁴ Tajikistan continues to permit the basing of the Russian 201st Motorized Rifle Division, which never left Tajikistan when it became independent. Tajik president also stated Tajikistan’s interest in having stable and beneficial relations with the western countries, including the United States, as well as with Asian and Islamic countries. He also described relations with China as “good-neighborly” and commented that economic relations are growing daily. Additionally, Tajikistan values cooperation with international and regional organizations and would contribute as much as it could to the collective solution of regional and other issues.

As early as 2000, Tajikistan maintained that there could be no military solution to the Afghan crisis; any victory by any party to the conflict would be temporary and would not lead to the establishment of peace and stability in that country. However, in 2001 Tajikistan offered its full cooperation to the U.S. Global War on Terrorism. Also, in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the Tajik president, like other Central Asian leaders, indicated a growing preference for relations with the West. However, in 2004 Russia regained its influence as Tajikistan agreed to host a new Russian base in Dushanbe that would house 5,000 soldiers and could be expanded to an airbase in future. At the same time, Russia agreed to write off \$330 billion of Tajik debts and said it would provide investment amounting to \$2 billion over the next five years.⁵⁵ Also, RUSAL, the Russian aluminum-making conglomerate, owns a Tajik aluminum plant, which is the country's only significant factory. In regard to its Central Asian neighbors, Tajikistan has the most strained relations with Uzbekistan, which is largely due to Uzbekistan's aggressive behavior towards Tajikistan. Uzbekistan appears to regard Tajik development efforts, particularly in the hydropower sector, as a threat to Uzbekistan's leadership role in Central Asia. Tajikistan wants to use water for hydropower with a goal of diminishing dependence on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for energy products, which consequently would decrease Uzbekistan's share of water, which it uses for irrigation of its main exporting commodity – cotton. Uzbekistan has also pursued a multidirectional foreign policy, “with sudden and drastic”⁵⁶ orientations towards Russia and China or the West based on which power provided support for the regime against the political rivalry among the Uzbek elites. In the first decade of Uzbekistan's independence, President Karimov sought to develop closer ties with Russia, which resulted in the signing of a Friendship Treaty in 1992, as well as a variety of other organizations backed by Russia such as the CSTO. In 1999, Uzbekistan withdrew from the CSTO as President Karimov believed his nation's sovereignty was at risk (in fact, sovereignty and stability have been the driving forces behind his foreign policy)⁵⁷ and began to actively seek relations with the United States while continuing bilateral relations with Russia. To this end, Uzbekistan joined the NATO PFP and the U.S.-backed GUAM. However, when American pressure for democracy became too great or too annoying, Karimov turned to China and Russia and joined the SCO, as neither of them was interested in the democratic development of Uzbekistan or its human rights record.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, worried about Islamic insurgents and because of renewed American interest, the Uzbek president again swayed towards the United States and offered the use of its military facilities for operations in Afghanistan. In return, Uzbekistan received significant military assistance. Additionally, the two countries signed an

accord in March 2002, which obligated the United States to take any threats to Uzbekistan's security seriously and committed Uzbekistan to a comprehensive program of economic and political reform. However, good relations with the United States did not last long. The cancellation of \$18 millions in non-military aid in 2004 on the basis of human rights violations combined with the Tulip Revolution that overthrew Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian government caused obvious concern in Tashkent, since it also faced domestic unrest in May 2005. Thus, Uzbekistan decided to expel the United States from its territory and signed an alliance treaty with Russia in November 2005, which provided Uzbekistan protection against threats from both state and non-state actors. There was also unofficial talk of a possible small Russian military presence in Uzbekistan. In his 2005 address to the nation, President Karimov stated: "we are ready to actively cooperate with all countries with which our national interests coincide. At the same time, we want to have open relations for dialogue with countries we have different views on various issues of international life."⁵⁸ However, in 2006 in an effort to appease the West, President Karimov removed the Andijon governor from his post blaming him for neglecting the people's grievances and failing to resolve mounting socioeconomic problems. He also acknowledged that poverty and lack of opportunities drove young Uzbek people to join Hut, a group that instigated popular unrest in Andijon in May 2005.⁵⁹

Furthermore, despite strained relations with the United States, Uzbekistan expressed interest in joining the BTC gas pipeline, another sign of President Karimov's intention for rapprochement with the United States. However, Uzbekistan's actions have been contrary to its policy, as it has acted as a hegemon towards the weaker Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Through their multidirectional foreign policies, the Central Asian states have not only furthered their interests and maximized their gains, but also have been able to influence the SCO agenda and to some degree the U.S. policy in Central Asia. For instance, the SCO's 2005 Astana Summit declaration that called for withdrawal of U.S. troops from Central Asian bases was watered down at the last minute through the diplomatic efforts of China and Russia.⁶⁰ Also, despite the same resolution, Kyrgyzstan decided to allow continued deployment of the U.S. troops at the Ganci airbase in support of U.S. military activities in Afghanistan. However, in February 2006, Kyrgyzstan asked for a rent increase from the \$2 million to \$207 million a year. After negotiations, Kyrgyzstan and United States settled for approximately \$150 million for the continued use of Ganci airbase for the year 2007.⁶¹ Although some analysts interpreted the rent increase as an indirect way to drive out the Americans, it is more likely that President Bakiev was trying to strike a power balance between Russia and China on the one hand, and the United States on the other. Moreover,

military assistance from the United States constitutes a significant portion of Kyrgyzstan's income –nearly eight percent– and is much needed for Kyrgyz economy.

Additionally, by providing the use of their military facilities, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have been able to influence the Bush Administration to relax its demands for democratic and economic reforms. In exchange for the use of the airbases, the U.S. assistance to the region more than doubled and reached \$723.51 million in 2002 with the bulk of assistance remitted to security and law enforcement programs (thirty percent), while political and economic reform programs received only sixteen and nine percent, respectively, in 2002.⁶² Given that the United States has criticized Uzbekistan for Andijon killings and its loss of an important base in the region, i.e., Karshi-Khanabad, assistance to security and law enforcement programs remained high in comparison to other reforms. In 2006, the U.S. government allocated fifty nine percent of the assistance package for security and law enforcement and only seventeen and twenty eight percent for political and economic reforms, respectively.⁶³ Thus benefiting Central Asian leaders who use these funds to fight Islamic and other opposition under the guise of creating security and stability in Central Asia.

Furthermore, after the loss of Karshi-Khanabad airbase and its position in Central Asia, the United States responded with the idea of a Greater Central Asia, a concept originated in a paper by Frederick Starr. He proposed that in dealing with Uzbekistan the United States should try to find successful bilateral programs and consider positive developments that it has made, such as allowing international experts to review charges of improper treatment of prisoners, cooperation with recent U.S. initiatives in the training of local government officials and police, and the modest progress in its parliamentary elections, rather than focusing solely on negatives such as Uzbekistan's human rights record.⁶⁴ Starr suggested that the United States should be less aggressive in pushing for immediate democratic reform in Central Asia, and use incentives to reward minor changes. In 2006, both Vice President Richard Cheney and the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice showered President Nazarbaev with praises for having democratic elections with several presidential candidates that the OSCE, which had 460 observers in the country, concluded that Kazakh elections lacked meaningful competition among candidates and political parties.⁶⁵ Still, OSCE observers acknowledged some positive developments where they occurred. Many analysts agree that this approach would yield better results in accomplishing U.S. and Western goals in Central Asia. The European Union has also decided to lift a travel ban on eight top Uzbek officials and renew an arms embargo that was imposed following the Andijon killings, in

order to encourage Uzbekistan to improve its human rights record and deepen cooperation with the union.

Conclusion

In 1996 China invited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia to join the Shanghai Five to settle border issues that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As this collaboration was productive, the parties agreed to deepen their cooperation in other areas such as politics, diplomacy, economics, energy, trade, tourism, environmental protection, regional security and stability. In 2001, after unsuccessful efforts to obtain support from the United States, Uzbekistan joined the group, and it was renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. During 2004 and 2005, Mongolia, India, Pakistan and Iran became observers in the organization.

An appealing characteristic of the SCO to all of its members is that it addresses many of their interests without precluding them from making bilateral deals with other nations. This has allowed the Central Asia states to maintain strong relations with the West and the United States in order to offset Sino-Russian domination or a disproportionate dependence on them. Although the color revolutions and the Andijon killings have set back U.S.-Central Asia relations, especially U.S.-Uzbek relations, there already have been efforts on both sides to reconnect. The United States responded with its Greater Central Asia Policy and Uzbekistan has been trying to rekindle relations with the West via Germany. Furthermore, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are donor dependent and need E.U. financial support, directly and through international financial institutions, while Kazakhstan seeks western support for broader political aims and aspires to assume the chairmanship of the OSCE and to gain international prestige.

It is in the interests of the Central Asian states to continue the multidirectional policy towards the major powers that have expressed willingness to develop and secure Central Asia. No major power single-handedly has been able to satisfy all of Central Asian needs, nor do the Central Asian states want a total dependence on one power. It seems clear that, Central Asian leaders will continue to exploit major power differences and sell their cooperation to the highest bidder. Most importantly, multidirectional foreign policies have allowed Central Asian leaders to pursue their national (and personal) interests and have a voice in the SCO as well as influence U.S. policy in Central Asia. Overall, the SCO has potential to become a powerful regional organization that can help bring about stability and economic prosperity in Central Asia. Even though, the SCO and the United States do not agree on every issue, such

as the democratization of the Central Asian states, which the SCO views as interference in domestic affairs, there is a number of areas they agree on, such as security and stability, economic development, and regional cooperation. To this date, the United States has been unsuccessful in encouraging democratic governance in Central Asia, hence a change in strategy and greater sincerity is needed.

NOTES

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Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan Tajikistan Uzbekistan

2002 90.00 95.00 73.00 219.80

2003 92.00 56.60 49.00 86.10

2004 74.20 50.80 50.70 50.60

2005 53.20 50.40 59.90 91.60

2006 88.48 43.54 45.01 49.41

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