

## FAILURES OF US POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the failure of US policy to achieve many of its stated goals in Central Asia, particularly since 11 September 2001. It will briefly examine the formation and direction of US policy in the five republics of Central Asia-Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan – after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russian responses to these policies. It will then look at the changes to US policy in the region following September 11, 2001, American expectations from these changes, and Russian cooperation with, and counter-measures to America's presence in Central Asia. Next, the reasons for the failure of US policy to achieve many of its goals following September 11, and the continuing expansion of Russian influence will be examined. Finally, there is a discussion on the possible directions US policy towards Central Asia could take in the future.

**Key Words:** Central Asia, American foreign policy, American military policy.

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In the period following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the US first gained access to Central Asia, a region that had long been closed to almost any American influence. In the period following the attacks of September 11, 2001, the US was able to establish, with some Russian cooperation, a direct military presence in the region to pursue its war in Afghanistan. After the defeat of the Taliban, the US had over 9,000 troops in Afghanistan, agreements for the use of airbases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, a limited presence in Tajikistan, and overflight rights from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Russian influence in Central Asia, on the other hand, seemed to be on the decline.

Almost six years later the US still has a considerable military presence in Afghanistan, but the situation in the other countries has changed. American troops have lost access to one base; the other remains a contentious issue. Overall, there has been little positive change, and some negative developments from the American perspective. On the other hand, Russia has begun to reassert its influence in the region in recent years. This can be seen in its basing and energy agreements, as well as in military cooperation, and foreign policy alignments. Other regional powers have also become active in Central Asia.

To understand the factors that have led to the failure of much US policy in Central Asia, it is necessary to briefly look at the formation and implementation of that policy between 1991 and September 11, 2001, and the changes that occurred between September 2001 and the summer of 2005.

Following the independence of the five Central Asian republics in 1991 the US determined a number of limited national interests and policy goals in the region. Among these were: preventing the spread of nuclear and biological weapons; ensuring access to, and a US role in, the development of the region's natural resources; integrating Central Asia into Western political-military institutions; protecting the sovereignty and independence of the new nations; improving border security; encouraging market-oriented economic reforms and supporting the growth of democracy and human rights; preventing the rise of Islamic radicalism; and countering Russian, Chinese and Iranian influence in the region, (Wishnick, 2002: 2; Fuller, 1994: 30) Although phrased somewhat differently, these remain the goals of US policy in Central Asia to this day.

However, between 1991 and September 2001, with the exceptions of eliminating nuclear arsenals and increasing military cooperation, limited progress was made on achieving US policy goals in Central Asia. There was frustration at the pace of economic and democratic reform in these countries as they appeared to be transforming into Soviet-style regimes. Energy resources turned out to be difficult to develop and transport. Although contacts with Central Asia continued, they were not a high priority for US policymakers despite growing concerns about Afghanistan.

After 11 September 2001 security became the main priority of US foreign policy. It was clear that the US would go after Usama Bin Ladin in Afghanistan and the Taliban regime that sheltered him. However, to wage war in Afghanistan the US would need the Central Asian republics because neither China nor Iran would cooperate with the US military, and Pakistan could offer only limited assistance due to widespread anti-American sentiment and support for the Taliban in its military and intelligence services. Nonetheless, following intense diplomatic activity, the US obtained what it needed. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan both granted the US overflight rights, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed basing agreements, and in mid-October Tajikistan granted overflight, landing and basing rights to the US.

Air strikes against targets in Afghanistan began on 7 October 2001, Kabul fell in mid-November, and by late December a new interim government was in place (Jonson, 2004: 87; Moore, 2003: 110-128, 269-284). Thus, by the beginning of 2002 the political and security situation in Central Asia had undergone a major transformation. In Afghanistan, the Taliban regime had been toppled, though not entirely destroyed. In Uzbekistan nearly 1500 US military personnel were stationed at the Khanabad airbase (K-2) outside the town of Qarshi (Moore, 2003: 29-30), 3000 in Kyrgyzstan at Manas, near Bishkek

(Denison, 2002: Wishnick, 2002: Jonson, 2004: 88-91), and approximately 300 at Dushanbe airfield in Tajikistan (Jonson, 2004: 86). High-level American officials and millions of dollars in aid made their way to countries which had only recently been criticized by the US for their lack of democratic reforms (Wishnick, 2002: Denison, 2002). Stability in Central Asia was now a greater concern than democratization and economic reform, despite official statements (Pascoe, 2002: Will U. S. Policy Backfire in Central Asia?, 2004).

From this zenith in 2002 three events would eventually lead to a dramatic change in the US position in Central Asia. The first was the US invasion of Iraq in March 2003 which shifted US attention and funds away from this region to the Middle East.

The second event was the so-called “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in March-April 2005 which led to the ouster of President Askar Akayev. The third of the “color revolutions” which had taken place in former Soviet territory, it unsettled leaders of the other Central Asian republics who feared its influence and example in their own countries. In its wake Uzbekistan clamped down on domestic democratic movements, and Russia and China emerged as counters to “unrest” in the region (Blank, 2005a; Kimmage, 2005).

The final event occurred on May 13, 2005 in the Uzbek city of Andijon when Uzbek security forces fired on a group of protesters, following a prison break by armed militants. The government claimed that only 173 were killed, but eyewitnesses put the death toll in the hundreds (Uzbek Government, 2005). The US and other Western countries called for an independent investigation into events, but Uzbek President Karimov angrily rejected this call, claiming that the Andijon uprising was an outside attempt at regime change (Kimmage, 2005).

The fallout from Andijon was swift. In June US operations from K-2 were restricted, and on 5 July leaders of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) called for a time-table for the withdrawal of US-led forces from facilities in SCO territory (Goldsmith, 2005: Kimmage, 2005). Finally, on 29 July Uzbek officials gave the US six months to evacuate K-2, citing the alleged negative effects of the base on the health, society and economy of the local residents (Kambarov, 2005). The US was caught off guard by the demand, but operations were gradually shifted to Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan and the withdrawal was completed by year’s end (Uzbekistan Serves, 2005: Synovitz, 2005).

US-Uzbek relations only continued to worsen. As Western leaders repeated calls for an independent investigation into Andijon; US lawmakers looked for ways to pressure the Uzbek government. Uzbekistan, however, continued to reject these calls, implicated the US in the uprising, and moved closer to Russia and China who had supported President Karimov’s actions (McMahon, 2005a; McMahon, 2005b; US, EU, 2005). In addition, Uzbek authorities refused to accredit some US correspondents, and a number of foreign, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) were expelled (Saidazimova, 2005: Corwin, 2005).

Russia moved to take advantage of the situation. Russian journalists and media specialists visited Tashkent in June 2005, and wrote articles supporting the Uzbek version of events in Andijon (Corwin, 2005). In September, the two countries held their first-ever joint military exercises (Pannier, 2005). The clearest indication of the change in relations was the signing of a mutual defense pact on 14 November 2005. In addition to a mutual defense provision, the treaty also provides for access to each other's military facilities, creating the possibility of a Russian base in Uzbekistan. In December it was reported that Uzbekistan had applied for membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) (Blagov, 2005; Torbakov, 2005; Marquand & Benderskyt, 2005; Oğan, 2006).

Events beyond Uzbekistan in 2005 also concerned the US. China was emerging as a more serious force to be reckoned with in Central Asia. In August the Chinese and Russians participated in joint military exercises, an indication, perhaps, of the two countries' shared concerns over the US presence in Central Asia and the spread of Islamic radicalism (Cohen, 2005b). In addition, there were reports that China had made inquiries about gaining access to K-2 after the US evacuation order, and had contacted Kyrgyz officials about the possibility of establishing a base in that country (Blank, 2005b).

In Kyrgyzstan public statements also indicated a change in attitude towards the US. The day after elections, President-elect Bakiyev raised the issue of an eventual American withdrawal from Manas. Shortly afterwards, the Russian military announced that it was considering doubling the number of troops and increasing the number of aircraft stationed at Kant air base (Baltabaeva, 2005; Blau, 2005b). Later in the year, after reassuring the US that it would be able to continue to use the Manas air base, the Kyrgyz government began talks to renegotiate the terms of the lease, but all indications were that the cost would rise considerably. Russia, however, would continue to use the Kant air base for free (Orozobekova, 2005).

At the same time the US administration increased public diplomacy to the region, citing three factors: the events in Uzbekistan; the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan; and the emergence of Kazakhstan as an increasingly important country in the region due to the growth of its economy (McMahan, 2005a). In addition to then – Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's July visit to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in October. One week later Secretary Rumsfeld made an Asian tour that included China and Kazakhstan (Cohen, 2005a).

By the end of 2005 the geopolitical balance in Central Asia had undergone a major realignment that had generally favored Russia, and, to some degree, China. **For example**, Russia had not only forged closer security links with Uzbekistan, but was also ready to invest heavily in the country, particularly in

the energy sector, something the Americans had been unwilling to do. The Chinese had bought into oil production in Kazakhstan, and the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline linking the two countries had gone into operation. In addition, the SCO was becoming a more cohesive body in regard to policy statements and security cooperation (Kimmage, 2005; Blau, 2005a; Blagov 2005c; Marquand & Bendersky, 2005).

In 2006 US policy goals in Central Asia remained basically unchanged from 1991. The strategy to achieve these goals was based on three pillars which were to be pursued simultaneously: security cooperation, US commercial and energy interests, and commercial and political reform (Boucher, 2006).

In the area of security cooperation the US was active in military training and aid programs for Central Asian militaries, regional anti-narcotics trafficking measures, and efforts to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or nuclear materials. In connection with the last two areas, the US was involved in improving border security through the construction of border posts and providing funds, equipment and training for local border troops in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan (Boucher, 2006).

To advance energy and commercial interests the US continued to work for construction of a trans-Caspian pipeline (TCP) that would ship natural gas from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan via the Baku-Tiflis-Ceyhan pipeline, bypassing Russian pipeline networks (Kucera, 2006d). In addition, the US adopted a new approach to regional integration, seeking to forge links between Central and South Asia. Although the US would continue to foster ties between the Central Asian republics and Western organizations, the emphasis would be on strengthening links with South Asia. These would be developed through infrastructure projects to encourage and increase regional trade, and energy projects that would allow Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to sell surplus electricity to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (Kucera 2006d). The goal was to provide an alternative to trade and security links with Russia and China, and to circumvent Uzbekistan. However, this plan suffered two major problems. First, the key to its success, and its weak link, was Afghanistan, which would have to be stable enough to act as a bridge between Central Asia and markets to the south. Second, it did not appear to take into account the large Russian presence in the Central Asian energy sector (Boucher, 2006).

Support for commercial and democratic reform was provided through various US assistance programs, with education being singled out as a field which the US should emphasize. The State Department's financial support for the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, and its scholarship program for Turkmen students were given as examples of the kind of efforts that should be expanded in the future (Boucher, 2006).

A brief look at developments in 2006 between the US and each of the republics of Central Asia gives some idea of the degree to which the US was

able to achieve its policy goals. In both Tajikistan and Turkmenistan there was no significant change in their relations with the US, although the death of Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov on 21 December raised the possibility that there could be a change in US-Turkmen relations in the coming year.

Despite the previous year's events, some cooperation between the US and Uzbekistan continued. In April the US, Russia and Uzbekistan collaborated to remove weapons-grade nuclear waste from Uzbekistan and transport it to secure facilities in Russia. In addition, Germany continued to maintain a small contingent of troops at Termiz for operations in Afghanistan. There were reports that the US administration was reconsidering its approach to Uzbekistan in order to regain some influence in the country and to prevent it from coming totally under the sway of Russia and China (Blank, 2006). However, some members of the US Congress were opposed to restoring ties (Kucera, 2006c). In August US officials visited Tashkent, but nothing substantial emerged from the discussions (Pannier, 2006a).

In contrast, Kyrgyz-US relations were active, if not always smooth. In February, President Bakiyev stated that US use of the air base at Manas could continue as long as Afghanistan remained unsettled, if the US agreed to pay increased rent (Pannier, 2006c). Negotiations took place between 31 May-1 June, but ended without an agreement (Chadova, 2006). Talks resumed on 12 July, one day after Kyrgyz authorities announced that they were expelling two US diplomats for "inappropriate" contacts with local NGOs. On 14 July an agreement was announced: the US would pay the Kyrgyz government \$150 million annually, \$20 million in rent (up from approximately \$2 million) and the remainder in the form of various assistance programs (Tynan, 2006: US-Kyrgyz Relations, 2006).

Later, US-Kyrgyz relations encountered new difficulties. In November, after striking an American tanker during takeoff, a Kyrgyz airliner was forced to make an emergency landing and suffered \$3 million in damage. The next month, when threatened with a knife, an American guard fatally shot a Kyrgyz citizen at a base checkpoint. Although US troops in Kyrgyzstan are subject only to American military regulations, there were calls for a trial in Kyrgyz courts. Finally, on 13 December the Kyrgyz air traffic control body claimed that the US owed \$15 million in service fees and threatened to cut service if not paid. As a result, some Kyrgyz lawmakers suggested renegotiating the basing agreement (Sershen, 2006).

Kazakhstan had become an increasingly important country in US thinking on Central Asia by 2006. First, it was seen as a stable ally and a possible balance to growing Russian influence in the region. Secondly, due to the dramatic increase in oil prices, Kazakhstan was becoming a growing economic powerhouse in Central Asia. Finally, there were hopes that Kazakhstan's participation in Western-sponsored energy export ventures that bypassed Russian pipelines

could be increased (Kucera, 2006b). In the military sphere, Kazakh participation in NATO was upgraded to an Individual Partnership Action Plan (Nichol, 2006). President Nazarbayev visited Washington in late September, despite US opposition to Kazakhstan's bid to hold the OSCE chair in 2009 due to its poor record on democracy and human rights. Although it produced few concrete results, the visit was viewed as a success by both sides (Lillis, 2006a; Kucera, 2006a, 2006b).

The US aim of countering Russian, Chinese and Iranian influence in Central Asia appeared to meet with limited success in 2006. Participation by Central Asian states in organizations in which Russia was a dominant member, or were Russian-led increased. Uzbekistan joined the EEC in January, Kyrgyzstan agreed to increase its participation in the CSTO and the SCO, and Kazakhstan voiced support for the idea of a Russian-led Eurasian Union. Russian energy firms were in talks about, or signed agreements for various projects in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In May Kazakhstan pledged to more than double oil shipments via the Caspian Pipeline Consortium to the Russian port of Novorossiysk (Analysis, 2006; Blagov, 2006a, 2006b). In the military sphere, Russia and Uzbekistan reached an agreement in December that gave Russia access to the air base at Navoi during emergency situations, indicating that the two countries were moving closer together (Blank, 2007b). Kazakhstan signed new security and defense agreements with Russia, and in Kyrgyzstan Russia continued with plans to expand its presence at Kant air base, and scheduled joint anti-terrorism exercises for late 2006 (Blagov, 2006b).

China and Iran also increased their activities in the region. The most significant development was the signing of a \$600 million joint Chinese-Uzbek oil venture agreement in May 2006 (Analysis, 2006). Iran was involved in tunnel-building and hydroelectric projects in Tajikistan, and increased its trade with neighboring Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, moves seen as an effort by the Iranian government to counter US attempts to geopolitically isolate it (Kucera, 2006e). In addition, US policies faced combined Russian-Chinese resistance in the form of the SCO. As a result, US policymakers debated to what degree it constituted a threat to American interests and how best to deal with it. The general view was that the SCO should be taken seriously, but was not yet a serious threat to US interests in the region, and that the US had very little leverage to influence it, with the possible of exception of exploiting divisions among the members (Cohen, 2006b, 2006c; Maher, 2006; Murphy, 2006; Blank, 2006a).

In 2007 the US has pursued its Central Asia policy much as it did in 2006. It continues to press for regional integration, particularly with neighbors to the south, emphasizes the need for economic reform to attract private investment, and stresses the role that electricity sales could play in developing the economies of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. At the same time it stresses that the

Central Asians themselves are at the center of US policy, and are not regarded as pawns in anybody's game (Feigenbaum, 2007d, 2007g).

In Tajikistan little has changed for the US in 2007. American military planes still enjoy overflight and refueling rights, and a small contingent of French forces remains at Dushanbe. The most significant result of American aid to Tajikistan has been the Panj River bridge linking Tajikistan and Afghanistan, scheduled to open this summer, and US funding for the renovation and equipping of 15 border posts along the Afghan border (Feigenbaum, 2007c).

Turning to Turkmenistan, hopes were raised for a change in US-Turkmen relations following the death of President Saparmurat Niyazov in December 2006 and pledges of reform by its new president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov. However, despite a visit by US officials to the new president in February, no substantial results emerged and there have been no further visits (Kucera, 2007c; Boucher, 2007b.).

American relations with Uzbekistan remain limited. US officials visited Tashkent in March, meeting with a number of high-level Uzbek officials, but nothing concrete emerged from the meeting. However, prior to the visit there were indications that Uzbekistan wanted to improve its relationship with the US (Feigenbaum, 2007e).

US-Kyrgyz relations remain on track so far, but there is continuing strain. As a result, US officials visited in the spring and the summer to try to work out the differences between the two countries (Kucera, 2007b; Oğan, 2007; Pannier, 2007). A new source of controversy has been rumors that the base could be used for attacks against Iran, something US officials have vigorously denied (Feigenbaum, 2007a; Boucher, 2007a). An indication of how sensitive the basing issue is, was the US warning to the SCO about attempting to interfere in the basing agreement during its summit this August in Bishkek (US Tells Shanghai, 2007). Nonetheless, the US has continued to assist Kyrgyzstan in improving border security through reconstruction of border posts, providing new equipment and training border guards (Feigenbaum, 2007b).

In the area of countering Russian, Chinese, and Iranian influence in Central Asia, the US has suffered a number of setbacks of varying severity that impact on other policy goals, particularly in the fields of security and energy. In Tajikistan, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced in July that the aviation support component of the 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Rifle Division would be housed at the Ayni air base outside Dushanbe in 2008. While the planned deployment will be relatively small, and consistent with Tajikistan's obligations under the CSTO, it strengthens the Russian military presence in the region (McDermott, 2007).

In Uzbekistan, the Russian energy firm Soyuzneftegaz signed a multi-million dollar production sharing agreement with Uzbekneftegaz in February.



Other Russian firms continued to negotiate energy deals that, if signed, would further strengthen the Russian position in Uzbekistan's energy sector (Blagov, 2007d). However, there have been indications that the relationship between the two countries has its difficulties. In April an Uzbek court confirmed the 20-year sentence of an Uzbek officer convicted of spying for Russia. In addition, outside analysts continued to express the opinion that the Uzbek administration views Russia with considerable suspicion, despite the current cooperation (Skalova, 2007).

It has been with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan that the Russians have made some of their most significant policy successes so far this year. Russia had moved quickly to establish a relationship with the new Turkmen president. In February Russia sought guarantees that Turkmenistan would continue to supply natural gas to the Russian market, guarantees which it received. In addition, the two countries pledged to investigate ways to expand bilateral relations (Blagov, 2007c). At a summit of the leaders of the three countries in May, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan gave their support to a Russian-backed plan to expand the Central Asia-Center pipeline that follows the Caspian Sea shoreline and links Turkmenistan and Russia via Kazakhstan. Expansion of the pipeline under the planned agreement, which includes Turkmen and Kazakh financing, would allow for the export of the majority of Turkmenistan's gas production via Russia, leaving little that could be transported via the the proposed TCP that would be linked to the BTC pipeline. In short, this project allows Russia to maintain its control over gas exports from Central Asia to the West, and creates serious doubts as to the long-term economic viability of the BTC pipeline (Russia Registers, 2007; Blagov, 2007a). In another development, Kazakhstan announced plans to upgrade its military and purchase Russian arms (Blagov 2007b; Yermukanov, 2007).

One of the most surprising developments so far this year has been a visit to Kabul, Afghanistan this March by a working group from the Russian-led CSTO for its first direct talks with the Afghan government. While focus of the CSTO talks was narcotics-trafficking and anti-terrorism, the Afghan side was reportedly interested in receiving training in Russia and acquiring Russian arms, in part, due to perceived US inattention to reconstruction efforts (Blagov, 2007b).

Smaller-scale, but continuing Chinese activity and influence in Central Asia has been evident in 2007. In late April Chinese and Uzbek authorities signed an agreement to build a 530-km natural gas pipeline connecting the two countries, most likely through Kazakhstan (Russia's Central Asia, 2007). In addition to the Uzbek agreement, China reached an agreement on obtaining natural gas from Turkmenistan beginning in 2009 (Russia Registers, 2007). Chinese infrastructure projects, in particular road building, continue in Tajikistan and have helped to boost trade between the two countries (Trilling, 2007). In what may be an indication of how Central Asians themselves see China's future role in

the region, Chinese language classes have become increasingly popular in Kyrgyzstan (Marat & Kydyrmashev, 2007).

Iran, too, has continued attempts to expand its influence in the region. Tajik officials have brought up the possibility of Iranian assistance for modernizing a major aluminum plant, after an agreement with the Russians collapsed. In western Afghanistan, Iran continues to fund infrastructure and trade projects (Russia's Central Asia, 2007; Leithead, 2007).

To summarize, although US officials have stated, "Our policy objectives for Central Asia are ambitious, but we cannot afford to fail" (Boucher, 2006), US policy in Central Asia in the last two years has had limited success, and in some important areas, such as energy, has suffered a number of significant setbacks. The question to ask here is, why? The answer lies in a number of combined factors that have resulted in the US' current situation in Central Asia.

One of the first factors is geography. No roads will ever link Central Asia to the US, whereas Russia, China and Iran all border on one or more of these countries. Thus, it is far easier for any of these three countries to make and maintain contact, to establish a presence, or project their power in this region than it is for the US. In addition, the great distance between the US and Central Asia also means that, except in a crisis, the region is not likely to be the center of attention for most Americans.

Another factor is the history and culture of the region. Central Asia has only recently emerged from over seventy years of Soviet domination, and decades under the Tsars before that. As a result, Russian language, culture, and ways of thought are still very much a part of the region's make up. In addition to these intangibles, the infrastructure and economies of Central Asia were linked to Moscow, and have only recently begun to diversify. Iran has its own religious and cultural links to parts of the region. Although most Central Asian Muslims are Sunni, there are some Shia communities, and two dialects of the Persian language, Dari and Tajik, are spoken in the region. China has had less influence in Central Asia in the recent past, but Chinese contact with the region has a long history. In contrast, American contact with Central Asia really only began in the 1990s, and the Americans share no common history, common culture, or long history of trade and contact.

However, one of the most important factors in the decline of the US position in Central Asia has been the war in Iraq. The effects of this war on US policy in Central Asia have been felt in a number of different areas. One way it has had an effect has been as a distraction. As the war in Iraq has transformed into a bloody insurgency with continuing US casualties, American attention in both the political and military spheres has been focused on salvaging the situation there and influencing states in the Middle East. Central Asia has appeared far less significant in comparison since there is no immediate crisis demanding American action.

Another area in which the Iraq war has negatively influenced the US position in Central Asia is ideology. While the US was able to emphasize democracy and human rights during the Cold War, scandals related to Iraq, and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in particular, have made American statements on the need for democratic and human rights reform in Central Asia sound rather hollow. They have also helped to fuel growing anti-American sentiment in the region. In addition, there is a perception that the Bush administration employs double standards in its dealings with the countries of Central Asia. For example, Kazakhstan, which has numerous agreements with Western energy firms, has generally received limited public criticism on its record on democratization and human rights. In contrast, Uzbekistan, a country which had few commercial agreements with the West, was severely criticized for its handling of the events in Andijon in 2005. This perceived double standard is believed to have been one factor in the Uzbek decision to evict the US from the K-2 base (Burke, 2006: Sershen, 2007).

Another important impact of the Iraq war has been financial. With the war costing approximately \$10 billion a month, there is less money to fund programs in other regions. American aid to Central Asia, already relatively modest, decreased this year by approximately 24% when compared to 2006 (Kucera, 2007a). US officials have indicated that this decrease in funding is likely to continue in the coming years (Blank, 2007a). One victim of these funding cuts, and an indication of Central Asia's decreased importance to US policymakers, has been the Voice of America's (VOA) Uzbek language radio service. Although widely criticized for the effect it would have on Uzbek listeners, it was justified on the grounds that increased VOA programming in Arabic, Persian, Pashto and Somali was more important to US interests (Schrank, 2007: Rashid, 2007).

Another major factor in the decline in the US position in Central Asia over the past two years has been the change in the situations of Russia, China and Iran. In addition to their previously mentioned geographic and/or historical advantages, two other factors are working to the advantage of these three countries in their dealings with the countries in Central Asia. The first is that a call for democratic reform and respect for human rights, which often raises suspicion among regional leaders, is not part of their foreign policy. On the contrary, they have supported the regimes in power, and generally share a similar view that reform is equivalent to instability. The second factor is economic. While the US is paying for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Russia and Iran have enjoyed increased revenues due to the rise in oil prices. Although not an energy exporter, the Chinese economy has also been expanding in recent years. The result is that all three have increasing funds available for investment in Central Asia, while the US has been reducing its spending in the region.

In addition to these two factors, some factors work in Russia's favor alone. The increase in oil prices in recent years has not only given Russia greater

financial resources to pursue its policy goals in Central Asia, it has also made Russia a source of employment for thousands of workers from the region, and a market for their products. Central Asia has also become a consumer of Russian popular culture in the form of Russian TV, films, music and media. As a result, Russian influence is found at many levels, not simply the more obvious political or military ones (Hill, 2006).

In these circumstances, the US needs to review its priorities in Central Asia and then decide how it can best achieve these policy goals. In the foreseeable future security concerns will remain the main policy priority for the US in Central Asia. Since these concerns are shared by Russia, China and the countries of the region, the US could achieve some of its goals in this field with the cooperation of these nations, provided US actions in other fields are not perceived to be a threat to their own interests.

In the area of energy resources, the US may be forced to recognize that its ability to influence the energy policy of the Central Asian republics, and energy transport in particular, is limited. Convincing these countries to diversify their energy transport options can only succeed if they believe that having different options is in their best interest. However, this may be difficult as these nations' energy policy cannot be entirely separated from other national concerns and international relations.

The US will likely have little success in countering Russian and Chinese influence in Central Asia in the future. Russian political, economic, and military influence is growing and will probably continue to do so since Russian foreign policy now seems to be concentrated on the CIS countries (Hill, 2006). China's need for increased energy resources combined with its burgeoning economic power guarantees that it will be an active element in the region's affairs. Iran, too, will continue to try to expand its influence in Central Asia, but will probably have limited success due to suspicion of Iranian motives on the part of regional governments, and US and Russian moves against it. Nonetheless, the US will need to recognize that Russia, China and even Iran do have legitimate interests in the region and should seek to engage them constructively whenever possible (Linn, 2006; **Didâr-e Farmânde**, 2007).

US support for democratic reform and human rights is the most problematic US policy objective. It has created suspicion among regional leaders who fear for their regimes, but in the long run such reform could help avoid greater instability. Unemployment, corruption and repression are still problems in parts of Central Asia and if there is no legitimate outlet for social grievances or method for change, social upheaval with completely unpredictable results could be the outcome. How the US can urge legitimate, necessary reform while maintaining its dialogue with the regime in power is one of the greatest challenges in Central Asia. It will involve, in part, supporting non-violent opposition parties or figures without openly advocating regime change; a low-key, consistent, even-handed application of this policy to all countries; and

publicly correcting American failures in these areas whenever they occur and adopting strong preventative measures. In addition, US policymakers will have to balance the call for democratic change with other policy goals in the region (Cohen, 2006a).

Finally, the US must decide how much it is willing to spend to achieve its aims in Central Asia. Considering the disadvantages that the US already suffers, if it is not willing to spend more than it is now, it stands little chance of maintaining significant influence in the region, and the Central Asian republics will have even less incentive to maintain a serious relationship with Washington. Afghanistan between the withdrawal of the the Red Army in February 1989 and October 2001 should be a warning to US policymakers of what can happen if a country is simply abandoned. To help offset the costs of development and aid projects the US should look for international partners willing to participate in them.

The US will very likely maintain a presence in Central Asia in the future, although it will probably be more limited than in the past. This will be the result of the American desire to remain in the region, but also because the countries of Central Asia themselves may find it in their own interest to have the Americans there in some form. Although Russia seems set to become the major actor in Central Asia, having links to the US and the West as a counter to Russia's strong influence, or as a tool in their relations with Russia could prove very useful for the countries of the region (Kimmage, 2007: Uzbekistan: Do IMF and ADB Visits, 2007: Osmonov, 2007). However, if the US is to maintain a long-term presence in Central Asia it will also need to find a stronger justification for that presence than instability in Afghanistan or willingness to pay high rent (Blank, 2006b). Whatever the future may bring, Central Asia will undoubtedly remain an area of intense geopolitical interest and activity for some time to come.

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