U.S. STRATEGY AND POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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It goes without saying that American geopolitics and geostrategy are of a genuinely global nature and affect practically every region and every country. And Central Asia is no exception in this respect. America's influence there is of a multi-factoral and multi-level nature in every aspect—the political, military-strategic, economic, and ideological. From the very first days of independence, the Central Asian countries have been aware of America's influence (and pressure) in essentially every sphere.

In Central Asia, America is confronted with other world centers of power (Russia, China, the EU, Iran, and other Islamic states), which explains the fairly frequent contradictions. American policy in Central Asia depends to a certain extent on Washington's relations with these states, but it is not determined by them. On the whole, Central Asia's policy is part of the U.S.'s broader Eurasian strategy, which covers the Caspian, the Caucasus, Russia, Afghanistan, the Middle East, South Asia, and China.

It should also be said that America's Eurasian policy is part of Washington's much broader global strategy designed to perpetuate America's domination in the world economic and financial system and its military-strategic superiority. America is seeking greater geopolitical influence (in Eurasia among other places) and containment of potential rivals (China, the EU, and Russia), as

well as struggling against so-called international terrorism (for control over the Islamic world).

Central Asia is an important, but not the only, element of the U.S.'s global strategy. At the same time, it is critically important for the U.S.'s Eurasian geopolitics to establish control over Eurasia. For this reason, Central Asia's role and importance for Washington will become even greater.

America's foreign policy is full of contradictions: its rational and well-balanced elements are combined with ideological approaches; presumptuous and even aggressive actions irritate the allies and provide the enemies with the chance to accuse the United States of Great Power arrogance and a unilateral approach to the world. This stems from the split in the American political establishment, which cannot be described as a group of like-minded people. Ideally, the administration should act as a closely-knit political and ideological team. The split in America's strategic community (and society) over the country's foreign policy affects U.S. conduct on the international arena to a certain extent.

This contradiction has an institutional aspect as well: together with the State Department and the National Security Council, the structures directly responsible for America's foreign policy, the Congress, the media, and public opinion (through the lobbying system and NGOs) largely shape U.S. conduct abroad. In addition, from 2001, the Department of Defense acquired much more weight in foreign policy decision-making. This is only natural since the country has been de facto in a state of war since the end of 2001.

The Evolution of American Strategy in Central Asia

Washington's Central Asian policy can be divided into several stages. At the initial stage (1991-1996), it was guided by several factors: first, the U.S. unofficially accepted Russia's geopolitical responsibility for the region and its interests; second, Washington was more concerned over the future of the Soviet nuclear potential deployed in Kazakhstan; third, America was uneasy about the potentially stronger position of Islamism, since Iran was one of the closest neighbors.

At the second stage (1996-2001), American strategy acquired new priorities: the Caspian's hydrocarbon reserves; and the pipeline later known as Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, which bypassed Russia and Iran. In 1997, Central Asia and the Caspian were declared a zone of "U.S. vital interests" and were included in the sphere of responsibility of the U.S. CENTCOM. These changes were molded into the so-called Talbott Doctrine. The United States made it clear that it was not seeking monopolist strategic domination in the region, but demonstrated that it would not tolerate the attempts of other great powers to seek such domination. At this stage, Washington was no longer concerned about taking Russia's interests into account.

It was at this point that America revised its attitude to Turkey's and China's role in the region, which was previously considered a positive factor that might bridle Moscow (at least theoretically). It looked as if Washington had decided to unilaterally shoulder responsibility for the region. At that stage, the United States was actively promoting the BTC pipeline, as its key geopolitical project, to move Caspian energy reserves bypassing Russia and Iran. By the end of the 20th century, America began demonstrating a growing concern over the threat to the Central Asian countries posed by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The 9/11 drama ushered in the third stage (2001-2005). The United States plunged into a wide-scale struggle against international terrorism represented by the militant Islamic radicals; it launched a military operation in Afghanistan and deployed its military bases in some of the Central Asian re-

publics to carry out the counterterrorist campaign. It should be said that from the very start, George W. Bush's Republican Administration practiced new approaches to Central Asia, which became part and parcel of the general counterterrorist struggle in the wake of the stormy events of 2001.

In fact, the U.S.'s new Central Asian strategy became part of the National Security Strategy formulated at approximately the same time. The United States discovered that the region was indispensable with respect to its united antiterrorist front and energy security. It was at this stage that the United States tried to formulate its Eurasian strategy, which presupposed drawing closer to Russia and India for strategic purposes, more consistent relations with China, using Eurasian hydrocarbon reserves (of Siberia, the Caspian, and Central Asia) as an alternative to OPEC, enlarging NATO further to the East, and changing the nature of America's relations with its West European allies. This strategy inevitably affected Central Asia.

At that stage the U.S. first consolidated its military-strategic presence in the region and set about expanding it together with NATO. Washington stepped up its military-political cooperation with the Central Asian countries. It built up its pressure on the local states within the "support of democracy" strategy; its biting criticism of the human rights violations by some of the Central Asian regimes could not but have a negative effect on the nature of the relations between the local states and the U.S. Washington was very vexed by the more active involvement of the other interested powers (Russia and China), which tried on a bilateral basis and within multilateral cooperation in the form of the SCO to limit America's influence in the region.

The concern of the Central Asian governments as well as of Moscow and Beijing over the results of America's involvement mounted along with the wave of so-called Color Revolutions that swept the CIS in 2003-2005, which the United States peremptorily supported. The events in Kyrgyzstan, which removed President Akaev, and Uzbekistan, which had to quench the riot in Andijan in the spring of 2005, produced a negative response to the American strategy both in the local countries and in their "elder" SCO partners. In the summer of 2005, the SCO unanimously demanded that the United States specify the deadlines for withdrawing its military bases from the region. In the fall of the same year, the United States began its withdrawal from Uzbekistan.

Since 2005, the U.S.'s strategic circles have been discussing a new geopolitical project for a Greater Central Asia under America's aegis. Washington intends to tie Central Asia and Afghanistan and possibly other neighboring regions into a single military-strategic and geopolitical whole.

The United States is putting its new strategic approaches into practice, including with respect to Greater Central Asia. The novelty was part of Washington's strategy of global readjustment to the vast geopolitical Eurasian expanses, of which the Greater Middle East was a part. By 2006, American strategy and policy in Central Asia entered a new, fourth stage.

So far, America's future strategy has not acquired a clear form. It looks as if it will include the following elements: creation of Greater Central Asia to incorporate the region into America's strategic designs in Afghanistan, South Asia, and the Middle East; revival of the "containment" policy in relation to Russia (and probably China) in Central Asia; much more intensive confrontation with Iran; more active American involvement in the Caspian; NATO's greater role in Central Asia, etc.

The strategy was launched at a time when the region was living through serious geostrategic and political changes. The events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the spring of 2005 revealed that the Color Revolution strategies carried out in Central Asia had their limits. It became absolutely clear that it was dangerous from the military-political and geopolitical viewpoint to artificially accelerate the regime change process using the methods that had proven relatively successful in Georgia and Ukraine.

America's relations with Uzbekistan took a drastic turn for the worse; the process that began in 2004 was brought to its peak by the Andijan events of May 2005. By evacuating the base in Khanabad America cut down its military presence in the region. At the Astana summit in early July 2005, the

SCO members unanimously demanded that the U.S. and NATO make it clear how long they intended to remain in Central Asia. This was a serious geopolitical challenge engineered by Beijing and Tashkent in particular.

The United States preserved its military presence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. It is obviously resolved to fortify its presence in the so-called Greater Central Asian region. The new American strategy is designed to change the situation in its favor under the rapidly changing military-strategic and geopolitical conditions.

Methods and Tools of America's Central Asian Policy

At the early stage, Washington was guided by two priorities and several issues of lesser importance when dealing with the newly independent Central Asian states. The United States recognized the five new Central Asian states immediately after the Soviet Union ceased to exist and established diplomatic relations with them. In 1992, the Congress passed the Freedom Support Act, under which American legislation was adjusted to the new geopolitical reality, in which there were fifteen newly independent states. The act helped to develop open markets, democracy, and civil society; it set up mechanisms conducive to trade, economic cooperation, and contacts in the sphere of education and ensured financial support of non-proliferation of weapons and demilitarization. The law was intended to strengthen the U.S.'s national security by preventing the restoration of communism and the emergence of religious extremism in Central Asia.

In July 1997, speaking at the Johns Hopkins University, Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott described the U.S.'s foreign policy aims in Central Asia. He pointed out that successful economic and political reforms would promote stability and meet the interests not only of the regional states, but also of all the countries outside the region. Failure would encourage terror and religious and political extremism; more than that—it might end in war. He also pointed out that his country was very much interested in gaining access to the local oil reserves.

The United States was definitely determined to prevent a repeat of the 19th-century Big Game, in which the smaller countries would have been used as small change in the battle for energy resources initiated by Russia or any other country driven by neo-imperialist ambitions. In March 1999, when speaking at the Congress, Stephen Sestanovich, Ambassador-at-Large to the states of the former Soviet Union, confirmed the United States' continued adherence to these principles. He also pointed out that despite the rather shaky advance toward certain aims (such as democratic and economic reforms), Washington was determined to develop its relations with the Central Asian states.

The George W. Bush Administration that came to power in 2001 was very critical of the foreign policy course of its Democrat predecessor and formulated its own, typically Republican, priorities. However, prior to 9/11, the administration was not very concerned with the potential threat of Islamist terrorism; the "arc of instability," with Central Asia as its core, was not a top priority either. In Central Asia, America merely followed the course charted by the previous administration. During the 2000 presidential campaign, George W. Bush criticized those who said that the United States might have helped other countries develop their national and state structures and that it should have kept a lower profile on the international scene.

In Central Asia, Washington could effectively use two tools of political pressure: (1) the local regimes could be accused of human rights violations, criticized as authoritarian, accused of corruption, and urged to become more democratic; (2) financial economic, military, technical, and humanitarian aid could be cut down. During the election campaign, America's Central Asian policy became

part of the domestic political struggle between the Republicans and the Democrats, which acquired even more vehemence as the 2004 presidential election drew closer.

Early in 2003, the American legislature was presented with bills that offered much harsher wording than before. They expressed "Congress' opinion," which meant that they were not binding. These documents spoke of the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan as "dictatorships and tyrannies." Early in 2004, President George W. Bush announced that the budget of the National Endowment for Democracy would be doubled to pay for even stronger interference in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern and post-Soviet countries. The NGOs are openly integrated into Washington's general strategy aimed at America's global domination.

In 2005, at the beginning of its second term, the administration announced that it would carry out another "charge for democracy." On 18 May, 2005, when talking at a congress of the International Republican Institute (IRI), the U.S. president made no secret of his country's intention to actively encourage the Color Revolutions that, he asserted, would take place in the future.[1] In August 2005, the United States announced that it had opened "democratic information centers" and that it was engaged in projects designed to keep independent media afloat in Kazakhstan and five independent radio stations in Tajikistan.

During 2004 and 2005, the situation in the CIS was developing under the strong impact of the events in Georgia, Ukraine, and partly Moldova, in the course of which the local regimes were replaced with pro-Western cabinets, while the new rulers demonstrated a strong desire to export Color Revolutions to other CIS regions. They did their best to support the opposition in some of the CIS members; the West, in turn, extended its direct political support to the opposition in Kazakhstan and Russia in particular.

The revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the events that followed it played a special role in America's Central Asian policy. At first the West and its epigones across the post-Soviet expanse hailed the regime change; the mounting political crisis in Kyrgyzstan, which caused destabilization, reduced to naught the efforts of the country's leaders to maintain any semblance of order, and the resultant political chaos forced the West to revise its regime change strategy in the CIS. It was obvious that the scripts written for the CIS European members were ill-suited to Central Asia. What was more, they were fraught with grave destabilization of individual countries and the region's geopolitical situation. Under these conditions, the West once more became aware of Russia's stabilizing role as a regional factor of great importance and was forced to take it into account.

By 2005, Washington's regime changing strategy hit stalemate; America shifted its interests, either deliberately or due to the circumstances, to Kazakhstan. While the 2004 parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan were accompanied by the "change of the elite" scenario actively promoted by NGOs and funds of all sorts living on Western money, the presidential campaign of 2005 was unfolding in a very different context: the tactics and methods of interference had been readjusted. Two factors were responsible for this:

(1) apprehension of excessive destabilization as the result of a regime change (this had already happened in Kyrgyzstan) and

(2) Russia's possible interference or its vehement response.

Throughout 2004 and 2005, the threat of a U.S. initiated Color Revolution in Kazakhstan remained real. In his report of 18 May, 2005, the U.S. president predicted inevitable changes in Central

[1] See: "President Attends International Republican Institute Dinner," available at [http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/05/20050518-2.html].

Asia. When talking about the region, he never mentioned Uzbekistan, which suggested that Kazakhstan had been selected for "democratization." Together with "Kazakhgate"—type maneuvers, the Americans badly needed more tools to put pressure on Astana to protect themselves from any actions that might damage U.S. interests in the region.

The threat of another Color Revolution was averted by Astana's unambiguous response to the events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, a well oiled mechanism of consultations with Moscow and Beijing, the delayed decision about the presidential election, as well as the unanimous position of the SCO members at the SCO summit in July 2005. As the date of the presidential election in Kazakhstan drew nearer, the danger of Washington's interference did not abate. The events of the end of the summer of 2005 confirmed that certain political forces of the United States had not abandoned their plans to stage a Color Revolution. The situation in Kazakhstan changed radically in the summer and fall of 2005.

America's Changed Strategy in Central Asia

The tactics and strategy of America's Central Asian policy changed and acquired certain new elements. American experts suggested that U.S. policy in Central Asia should be restructured together with U.S. public diplomacy because of the mounting anti-American sentiments. The trend toward a reassessment of America's policy and much more desired military strategic cooperation with Tashkent was further consolidated by a series of terrorist acts in April and July 2004.

It was recommended that Washington increase pressure behind the scene on its Central Asian partners to promote political and economic changes. In the process, it should be guided by two geopolitical imperatives. First, it should go on detaching Central Asia from the Caucasus in the geopolitical context. American experts were convinced that the region was typologically closer to the Middle East and Southeastern Asia, while the Caucasus was much closer to Europe.

American analysts pointed out that Washington would get bad headaches if the Islamists acting in Central Asia grew more radical and more belligerent: if forced to deal with shady regimes for the sake of its continued military presence, America would run the risk of tarnishing its image as a liberal and benevolent force. If the United States, they argued, became resolved to wage the "battle of ideas" on all fronts, it would need a much more coordinated and public diplomatic campaign to achieve positive results. It was recommended that Central Asia be included in the public statements on the need to observe democracy in the Muslim world.

Second, the United States was working toward developing a nationally oriented civil society in the Central Asian republics. Most of the expert community was convinced that the United States should support the idea of human rights and other aspects to which public opinion was especially sensitive. After a while, this would create a foundation for political movements able to act as a functional opposition to the ruling regimes, which was especially important in such states as Uzbekistan.

To put pressure on it, American analysts suggested that the U.S.'s military presence in the region should be diversified to make American policy there more flexible operationally and diplomatically. In this context, Kazakhstan was regarded as an alternative partner because of its highly promising economic and political potential.[2]

[2] See: J.K. Davis, M.J. Sweeny, *Central Asia on U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning: Where Do We Go From Here?* IFRA, Washington, D.C., 2004.

Prior to the terrorist acts of 2004 in Uzbekistan, Washington planned to put pressure on Tashkent to force it onto the road of liberalization. If the Uzbek side refused to cooperate, the U.S. should be ready to re-deploy its military from Khanabad and Karshi to Kazakhstan or other Central Asian bases. The events allowed Islam Karimov to go on with the old policy or even to intensify it. The West, in turn, increased its pressure.

The United States could safely ignore the interests of Russia and China in the region as long as they did not counter the global antiterrorist struggle. The airbase in Kant (within the CSTO framework) and the SCO antiterrorist center in Tashkent did not add tension to the relations between Washington, on the one hand, and Moscow and Beijing, on the other, merely because the American side never looked at them as threatening to its interests. Moreover, NATO may even conduct joint military exercises with Russian troops in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while the SCO antiterrorist center in Tashkent might become a starting point for cooperation between the United States and the SCO.

America's strategy in Central Asia is determined, first and foremost, by geopolitical factors. This is the main thing about it. The United States has concentrated on its broader military-political contacts with the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states. This is the main aim of cooperation between America and these two regions. Washington obviously has no intention of encouraging agrarian reform and high technologies; it demonstrated no intention of increasing its humanitarian aid.

American analysts believed that the White House was not always aware that some of the Central Asian republics were unable to resolve their economic, political, and social problems, mainly because their democratic institutions were completely impotent and there was no elementary political culture indispensable to every contemporary state. If Washington insists on the present course, NATO, under U.S. leadership, will turn into the "region's gendarme" with a leading position in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia; this will allow America to outline the limits of Russia's influence in the region.

Washington has often indulged in headstrong policies that bordered on bluffing. In 2001, American politicians acquired the habit of making thunderous statements designed to convince Russia, Iran, China, and the Central Asian countries that the United States intends to keep its military in the region for a long time to come. As a result, these countries could not demand that the U.S. withdraw from the region in 2002 when the counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan was over.

The American expert community believes that what they call "bureaucratic pluralism," or rather rivalry between the State Department and the Pentagon is the weakest point in America's policy in Central Asia. The State Department insists that today, when the Central Asian republics have found themselves on the frontline of the antiterrorist struggle, it is critically important to promote ideas of human rights and democracy. To achieve this, the State Department is pouring money into the independent media and journalism; it is helping to develop political parties, strengthen the freedom of religious convictions and the rule of law, and carry out local government reform and reform of the health system. Its annual reports habitually criticize all the Central Asian countries for their human rights violations.

The Department of Defense, in turn, concentrated on the security-related advantages created by cooperation with the region's states. In February 2004, when paying visits to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld did his best to play down the criticism hurled at the Karimov regime for human rights violations. America's interests in Central Asia are connected with the defense secretary's plans to modernize the American army and redistribute the American military bases on a global scale: they should be placed closer to the potential seats of conflict.

In 2005, the State Department, with Congress behind it, finally predominated: since that time on Tashkent's domestic policy has been criticized. On the other hand, the Department of Defense prevailed in its pragmatic approach to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan demonstrated late in July 2005 during Donald Rumsfeld's visit to the region.

In 2006, Washington shifted its accents. The official assessments of the situation in Central Asia changed. They were formulated by Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried at a Hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia. On 27 October, 2005, he said that America's strategy in Central Asia presupposed balanced regional cooperation in security, energy, and regional economic cooperation, as well as freedom through reforms. He noted that "Kazakhstan does have the potential to merge as a regional model," and described Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan "as possible emerging reformers," while Turkmenistan "remains unfortunately an autocratic state… We are nevertheless pursuing a policy of engagement with the government, seeking cooperation where we can, and where there are clear benefits to our interests," he said. In Uzbekistan, "the United States will continue to speak privately and publicly about our concerns," he added.

Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs E. Anthony Wayne was much more specific when addressing the American Chamber of Commerce at approximately the same time: "As Kazakhstan's economy continues to develop," said he, "it will be an engine for growth within Central Asia." When talking about State Secretary Rice's recent visit to Central Asia, American analysts agreed that it was intended to specify America's interests in the region and to demonstrate them to the local ruling elites. America wanted Moscow to act in a similar way: to outline its interests, to coordinate them with those who rule the Central Asian countries, and to harmonize them, openly and unambiguously, with America's interests in the region.

When on a visit to Astana in mid-October 2005, Henry Kissinger made more or less similar statements. He said that Kazakhstan, as a country at the crossroads of the largest civilizations, played an important role in the region and the world. In fact, in 2005, the U.S. had to decide whether to fan another Orange Revolution or to follow the laissez faire principle. Washington opted for the latter.

The National Committee for American Foreign Policy (NCAFP), a public organization of several influential businessmen and politicians concerned with America's image abroad and the country's genuine national interests all over the world, has good contacts in the cabinet and the strategic establishment. In 2005, it made its contribution to the changed position of the White House with respect to Kazakhstan.

In the spring of 2005, it dispatched a sort of mini think-tank to Kazakhstan; eyewitness accounts, meetings, and consultations enabled NCAFP members to draw up an analytical paper that offered a balanced and objective assessment of the situation. The document left no chances for the opposition, while the White House was asked to support the current state of affairs in politics. The committee sent the paper to the U.S. State Department and probably played an important role in Washington's assessment of the situation in Kazakhstan on the eve of the presidential election and the prospect of a Color Revolution. In 2006, the NCAFP confirmed its recommendations.[3]

In 2005, the American strategic circles presented a new geopolitical project: a so-called Greater Central Asia created with Washington's help. It presupposed that Central Asia and Afghanistan might be united into a military-strategic and geopolitical whole later connected to the so-called Greater Middle East controlled by the West (paper by the American Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus dated March 2005).[4]

It was intended to detach the extended region from the monopoly influence of the other great powers (Russia and China), to protect Afghanistan against the destabilizing influence of its neighbors (Pakistan and Iran), and to attach it to a much more stable and West-oriented Central Asia.

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[3] See: M. Rywkin, *Stability in Central Asia: Engaging Kazakhstan. A Report (with Policy Recommendations) on U.S. Interests in Central Asia and U.S.-Kazakhstan Relations,* NCAFP, New York, 2005; G.D. Schwab, M. Rywkin, *Security and Stability in Central Asia: Differing Interests and Perspectives,* NCAFP, New York, 2006.

[4] See: F.S.E. Starr, *A Greater Central Asia: Partnership for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors. The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program,* Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Washington, DC, 2005.

The new strategy was also expected to alleviate the fears that the Central Asian states might start thinking of American policy as a sporadic rather than systematic phenomenon. In other words, the local leaders might start doubting the United States' opportunity and resolution to insist on its regional presence in the face of Moscow and Beijing.

On the whole, the Greater Central Asian project completed and extended the earlier geopolitical project designed to set up a Greater Middle East and was supposed to pursue the same strategic aims, namely, diversification of strategic interests and stability in the region under American domination.[5]

Under this plan, Washington should maintain an illusion of "geopolitical pluralism" to keep Russia and China happy by letting them indulge in self-importance. Together with the West, they should have been granted the status of the guarantors and donors of the modernization process. The American strategists, however, would have been much happier if the Russian Federation and China remained "benevolent observers," which means that they should be removed from the active geopolitical game. It was suggested that for the same purpose India and Turkey should be invited as unofficial guarantors.

The Andijan events and the radical changes in Tashkent's foreign policy endangered the part of the project related to Uzbekistan. Initially the country was intended as an integration engine for Greater Central Asia through agreements with Pakistan, building a railway to Afghanistan in cooperation with Japan, creating a transport corridor to the Indian Ocean, and forming a free trade zone in the Ferghana Valley, in which other Central Asian countries were expected to be involved.

The economic section of the Greater Central Asian project presupposed that the local states would be incorporated as promptly as possible into the world financial and economic structures in which the West dominated; the region was expected to gain access to trade and transport routes to become an important center of international transportation of raw materials and commodities under American control. The agrarian sector was to be treated as a priority compared to industrial growth; agrarian policy was to be used to fight drug trafficking (here Kazakhstan's experience in fighting drug money laundering could be used, at least in part).

The project outlines several organizational-technical and diplomatic means to successfully implement America's strategy aimed at boosting the roles of the Pentagon and the State Department to make America's presence in the region even more effective. It was deemed necessary to increase NATO's role and importance as one of the key instruments of Washington's strategy. There were plans to set up a Greater Central Asian Council to allow the United States to coordinate regional policy on a permanent basis and even shape it; annual visits by the U.S. State Secretary to the Central Asian countries were intended as a regular feature of America's policy.

In 2005-2006, the U.S.'s policy in Central Asia entered a new stage. In the short-term perspective, the Greater Central Asian project looked like a folly. It was too difficult to implement in the conditions emerging at that time and in view of America's headaches in other parts of the world. In the mid-term perspective, however, we can expect that the present administration (or the one that replaces it) will arm itself with the project. After all, it contains all of America's main priorities and foreign policy aims, as well as the mechanisms needed to succeed.

The State Department applied the concept in practice in the fall of 2005 as Washington's official strategy in Central Asia. The region was moved away from the European department to the South Asian sector. Early in April 2006, the Greater Central Asian project was presented in Kabul as a U.S. Central Asian doctrine currently in effect.

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[5] See also: I. Zviagel'skaia, "Kliuchi ot schast'ia, ili Bol'shaia Tsentral'naia Azia," *Rossia v global'noy politike,* Vol. 3, No. 4, 2005, pp. 88-93; F. Starr, "Partnerstvo dlia Tsentral'noy Azii," *Rossia v global'noy politike,* Vol. 3, No. 4, 2005, pp. 72-87.

Under these conditions, it became absolutely clear that Kazakhstan was returning to the forefront of the U.S.'s Central Asian policy. What is more, Kazakhstan might be removed from Central Asia proper because of its geographic and geopolitical position: it borders on Russia, China's influence is increasing, while the situation around the Caspian and the future of Greater Central Asia depend on it.

Early in 2004, prior to the period of cooling off with the United States, Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov forced the offices of Western international organizations to re-register, which caused a lot of displeasure in the West. The Uzbek authorities were especially suspicious of such structures as George Soros' Open Society Institute, the National Democratic and the International Republican institutes. The Uzbek president preferred to ignore the protests and criticism of the West: he closed down the office of the Open Society Institute in the republic and tightened his control over other Western democratic and human rights organizations that described themselves as international. The U.S. Congress responded by cutting down its aid to the previous volumes and made it much harder to receive it. The aid, however, was too small to seriously affect the country's economy.

The events of Kyrgyzstan that took place in the spring of 2005 urged Tashkent to adopt even harsher measures. They forced all the interested sides (the West, Russia, and China) to reach a temporary consensus in an attempt to avoid sudden and radical disruption of political and economic relations in Central Asia. This understanding, however, excluded Uzbekistan. The West remained convinced that Tashkent should be pushed toward radical changes in its domestic policy and in economy; it continued to interpret the events in Andijan in the anti-Karimov light. Tashkent deemed it necessary to curtail military and political cooperation with the United States and NATO and move closer to Moscow, an unprecedented move in the country's post-Soviet history.

These developments were fraught with geopolitical complications. There is no doubt that Washington will persist in its efforts to restore its presence, even at the cost of a regime change. Analysts believe that the events in Andijan were the first survival test. In any case, the West was increasing its political and economic pressure on the Karimov regime.

During the May 2005 events in Andijan, the regime demonstrated to the West (with Moscow's complete political support and the moral support of Astana) that it was resolved to cut short any destabilizing moves. More than that: Tashkent turned away from the West toward Russia. At the first stage (in 2004), America ignored Europe's demands that President Karimov be given an ultimatum: either he agree to an international investigation or he will have to face new sanctions in the form of an embargo on weapons deliveries; and Uzbek diplomats will be deprived of visas. The Americans did not dare to corner the president of Uzbekistan—they tried to invite him to participate in a constructive dialog on cooperation.

Uzbekistan became an apple of discord between the U.S. State Department and the Pentagon: indeed, what was more important: proliferation of democracy or the antiterrorist struggle? The Pentagon wanted to preserve the airbase, while the State Department was inclined to harsh measures, namely political changes as the basic factor preventing possible unrest.

America and the West as a whole found themselves in a quandary: continued pressing for a regime change might destabilize the situation. President Karimov, in turn, demonstrated that he never intended to carry out real economic reforms and liberalization. He intended to freeze the situation to preserve his regime and social stability. He even went as far as hinting that America should remove its bases from Uzbekistan.

While earlier American strategists intended to give Karimov some time (until 2006) to readjust his policy, under the new conditions Washington was forced to leave the Karimov regime to its fate. Starting in 2005, however, the United States could no longer put pressure on Uzbekistan partly because of the Russian factor. There was another consideration—possible destabilization might upturn Uzbekistan and the region along with it.

Despite the cooling off, the American strategic community (the National Defense University under the U.S. Department of Defense and the National War College) warned that Washington made a grave mistake by withdrawing its military bases from Uzbekistan and stepping up its criticism of the Karimov regime, which had proven its viability and determination to use force to squelch the opposition. On the other hand, experts added that the threats to the regime were real and not an invention of the regime's propaganda machine. This group of experts, which worked for the Pentagon, suggested that America should pay more attention to Kazakhstan, which could offer an example of successful economic reforms carried out with U.S. support.

It was highly unlikely that Washington would perform another U-turn in its relations with Tashkent under the pressure of the American strategic establishment's pragmatic wing. This could have affected the interests of Russia and China in Central Asia. There was evidence that the United States had decided to wait until the political regime changed in Uzbekistan. In the summer of 2006, it became more or less obvious that Washington was adjusting its policy toward Tashkent; the contacts between the two countries resumed in August after Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher's visit.

Conclusion

Since 2001, America's policy in Central Asia has been defined by several geopolitical factors: the 9/11 events and the declared "war against international terrorism," America's policy in Eurasia and in the Middle East, relations with Russia, China, and the European Union, as well as the energy and oil factors. At the doctrine level, U.S. foreign policy was confirmed by the 2002 Strategy of National Security, which was partially revised and updated in 2006.

In recent times, four American analytic centers—the Harriman Institute at Columbia University, the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis in Washington, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and the Center for Technology and National Security Policy at the National Defense University—made an attempt to define U.S. policy in Central Asia. Details vary from one conception to another, but they all agree that America should preserve its geopolitical domination in Central Asia and through it in Eurasia too.

To guarantee the region's sustainable development, the geopolitical actors and parties involved should take the interests of all those involved into account. This particularly applies to Russia and the United States. Washington should take into account Moscow's interests in the region and its concerns about its strategic security. Under no circumstances should the United States undertake a regime change unilaterally, otherwise Russia will regard this as a "game without rules" and will respond accordingly.

The Central Asian states emerged onto the political scene as subjects of international politics more or less in their own right. This is probably the main change that occurred in the geopolitical situation in the region in the 21st century. This could not happen if any one power, the United States included, dominated there. If the process of transformation of the Central Asian states into "normal" states from the viewpoint of international politics goes on unabated for several more decades, it may trigger a consistent political and economic sustainable advance.