

## THE GREATER CENTRAL ASIA PROJECT: PRESENT STATE AND EVOLUTION

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The Greater Central Asia (GCA) project initiated in 2005 confirmed that the United States treated the region as a foreign policy and security priority. The project was primarily promoted by the changed balance of forces in favor of Russia and partly China, which called for an adequate strategic and geopolitical response.

At the same time, the Greater Central Asia idea can be viewed as a conceptual and ideological substantiation of what the United States is trying to accomplish in the region. This is a fresh (and logical) approach to America's entire previous foreign policy theory and practical regional policy.

In a wider sense the project is a strategic matrix the United States is using in Central Asia, the Caspian, and Afghanistan to channel the local geopolitical, military-political, and geo-economic developments in the desired direction. In fact, this is a mechanism for organizing the geopolitical expanse akin to the Greater Middle East. It is no coincidence that theoretically both projects are mutually complementary.

America has run into serious difficulties in Central Asia, which casts doubt on the GCA's future. In 2008, after concentrating on the Caucasus

the United States pushed Central Asia to the backburner. The events in South Ossetia riveted the attention of the U.S. Administration to the Georgian problem and relations with Russia. The Americans had to maintain a far from simple dialog with their European partners, who refused to take any anti-Russian steps. America's passive Central Asian strategy, however, has preserved some of the key parameters and elements the U.S. will reproduce in the long term in its regional policies. This means that we should take a closer look at the trends and prospects of the Greater Central Asia project.

## **The GCA Project: America's Response to the Regional Geopolitical Challenges. Is it Effective?**

Contrary to the widely accepted idea about the revolutionary nature of the GCA project for U.S. policy in Central Asia, it was devised merely because the George W. Bush Administration had no alternative. So it was a somewhat forced and logical strategic step, even though the U.S. State Department had discussed the idea a year earlier.

Close scrutiny reveals that the project contains the key ideas of America's policies of the 1990s (Central Asia should be removed from the sphere of Russia's and China's control while the bulk of its energy resources should be redirected via Afghanistan in addition to across the Caspian). In their new wrapping these ideas developed into a new comprehensive and strategic approach to the region that was given the new name of Greater Central Asia after the following circumstances in 2005:

1. Combined Russian and Chinese influence in the region reached dangerous levels at which the local countries might irrevocably turn to cooperation with both of these powers at the bilateral level and within the SCO.
2. The trans-Caspian and trans-Afghanistan pipeline projects had been shelved while China and Russia were moving toward even greater influence in the production and export of the Caspian energy resources.
3. In the absence of tangible results in the Caspian region Washington finds it hard to systematize its relations with Central Asia as a separate region, outside South Asia. Afghanistan is still an unstable and falling state with no geopolitical links with any of the regions, which makes it hard to coordinate its rehabilitation.
4. The continued American military presence in Central Asia and Afghanistan should and could be justified by the safety requirements for the pipelines and infrastructure stretching to South Asia and, on the whole, by the need to establish military-political cooperation with the Central Asian states and Afghanistan.

5. The American Silk Road project, within which the Central Asia + the Caucasus project was being realized (the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline projects being parts of it), stopped short of South Asia. No regional cooperation across Afghanistan to Pakistan and India was realized. Meanwhile, Washington badly needed such cooperation in order to establish controlled geopolitical pluralism in the region. This became even more important after Turkey fell short of its role of active geopolitical player in Central Asia.

This means that the GCA project was needed for objective reasons, which the United States has so far failed to remove, and accounts for the project's relatively unimpressive results.

## Aims and Tasks

The GCA project presupposes that when implemented it will create a mega-region by integrating Central Asia (in its traditional sense, namely five states: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), Afghanistan, and South Asia (Pakistan and India, two largest states, as well as Bangladesh, Burma, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka). In the fall of 2006 the Central Asian states were transferred from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs of the U.S. State Department (which dealt with them as former Soviet republics) to the Bureau of South Asian Affairs.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. State Department placed the GCA project on the firm foundation of the new energy and transport corridors and infrastructure supported by much more active mutual trade. It started by realizing the Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative entrusted to the U.S. Trade and Development Agency. The initiative was expected to connect Afghanistan with other countries; reconstruct the old infrastructure facilities and build new ones to connect Central and South Asia and add stability by encouraging contacts at the personal level.

This promotes, to a certain extent, the energy interests of at least Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan: they, and their Central Asian neighbors, will acquire another outlet to the world energy and trade markets. The West will gain access across the land mass to the region's resources, which can be used, among other things, for military-strategic purposes. Some of the sides involved in these projects have already signed memorandums of intent. The war in Afghanistan, however, prevents implementation of the pipeline projects even though America and Europe have recently been stirring up interest in them at the diplomatic and expert levels.

The GCA project has outlined the prospects for further stabilization in Afghanistan and the counterterrorist campaign waged by the U.S. and NATO. Potentially, Afghanistan can become a transit corridor for energy (financially the most promising income item) and other resources, which will help it to improve its financial and economic situation. The United States is inviting the international community and the states of the Caspian-Central Asian region to create conditions for Afghanistan's revival after a long period of international isolation and stagnation. This can be interpreted as an attempt to shift some of American responsibilities to other countries along with the greater part of the inevitable spending.

By encouraging India and Pakistan to play a greater role in the region the United States is out to use the opportunities thus created to oppose Russia and China (if they become too strong for American liking).

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<sup>1</sup> See: A. Iazmuradov, "Greater South Asia—America's New Regional Approach to Central and South Asia: How It is Developing and What Prompted It," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (40), 2006, p. 82.

## America's Practical Initiatives within the GCA Project

1. Active development of roads in Afghanistan to create communication corridors in the country and across it to be used by the U.S. and NATO for military purposes and to firmly link Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Central Asian countries. A year earlier the WB issued an easy loan for the restoration of the Kabul-Kunduz road and the Salang tunnel. The United States, in turn, granted, with the Congress' consent, \$80 million for the restoration of the Kabul-Kandahar-Herat road to connect Afghanistan with Pakistani and Indian ports.<sup>2</sup> On 26 August, 2007 the 800-meter-long bridge across the Panj to move heavy goods from Tajikistan to Afghanistan was commissioned.<sup>3</sup>

In April 2008 at the NATO summit in Bucharest the heads of the Central Asian states were presented with the "project of a railway that will connect Europe with the Central Asian states and Afghanistan. America initiated the project and will be its main investor. The Line Communication is expected to cross East European and Central Asian states: Ukraine, Byelorussia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan."<sup>4</sup> It was announced that the railway would be used for moving non-military goods, energy resources, and other natural resources.

2. Development of Afghanistan's agriculture to create conditions conducive to covering the country's demand for agricultural products; it might even produce enough to export agricultural surpluses to Central Asia.
3. Development of vast regional power networks covering the Central Asian states, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. In this sphere the Central Asia states could act together as a single energy exporter to Afghanistan and South Asia, which badly need power supplies. In 2006 a large-scale business forum called Electricity beyond Borders was held; "in August 2008 Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement on the Central Asia-South Asia-1000 Power Lines Project and on further development of Central Asian and South Asian energy markets in Islamabad. This agreement will come into force in 2013-2014."<sup>5</sup>

"Uzbekistan intends to triple its power deliveries to neighboring Afghanistan. This decision summed up the talks between the heads of the State Joint Stock Company Uzbekenergo and Ismail Khan, Minister of Energy and Water Management of Afghanistan. Today Afghanistan imports energy from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan."<sup>6</sup>

4. Development of cooperation in the security sphere designed to help the U.S. Central Command cope with its regional tasks in Central Asia and the Middle East; creation of conditions conducive to promoting U.S. military interests in the Caspian areas bordering on Iran and Russia. The United States is seeking the support of Kazakhstan, the key regional actor, the

<sup>2</sup> See: "Amerikanskaia politika v Afghanistane. Kakov ee kharakter?" 7 October 2003, available at [<http://www.musakov.ru/inc/ind.php?page=6&exist=1&id=202&print=1&year=2003>].

<sup>3</sup> See: "Prezidenty Tadjikistana i Afghanistana otkryli most cherez reku Panj," 26 August 2007, available at [<http://www.easttime.ru/news/1/1/298.html>].

<sup>4</sup> "Po natovskomu projektu SSHA postroiats zheleznuiu dorogu v Tsentralnoy Azii," 1 April 2008, available at [[http://www.ng.ru/cis/2008-04-01/7\\_nato.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2008-04-01/7_nato.html)].

<sup>5</sup> "Kyrgyzstan i Tadjikistan s 2014 goda budut prodavat' elektroenergiu v Pakistan," 7 August 2008, available at [<http://www.ca-news.org/print/34212>].

<sup>6</sup> "Postavki elektroenerгии iz Uzbekistana v Afghanistan uvelichatsia v tri raza," 4 May 2008. Source: Afghanistan.ru.

geographic location of which is strategically important for the GCA project. Predictably, America is building up political relations with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

At the Bucharest summit NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said that a decision had been made to coordinate the Alliance's and U.N.'s activities in Afghanistan and added that NATO and U.N. were resolved to build Afghanistan together.<sup>7</sup> In December 2007 the U.N. set up a U.N. Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia designed to promote cooperation between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, as well as Afghanistan, in order to address all the controversial issues and create conditions for sustainable cooperation.<sup>8</sup>

## Stumbling Blocks on the Road toward Greater Central Asia

1. In the midterm perspective security in Afghanistan and Pakistan is unlikely to be achieved while its stabilization at the civilian level looks highly doubtful in the near future. Nothing that has been done (or declared as done) to minimize drug trafficking brought any tangible results mainly because people in Afghanistan live on the revenue generated by drug production and drug trade. This means that joint projects with Afghanistan and cooperation with this country might create serious risks for the Caspian and Central Asian countries.
2. There are objective ethnic, confessional, and cultural differences between the Central Asian and South Asian nations. More than that: India and Pakistan are huge conglomerates of human resources and two of the potentially largest economies. "This means that the two regions cannot merge—South Asia might engulf Central Asia"<sup>9</sup>—this could well be the final aim of the GCA strategy.
3. The United States cannot contain the ever expanding contacts between the Central Asian states and Iran.

In 2007 the Central Asian countries and Iran supported by Russia and China invigorated their cooperation in the transportation sphere. This was further encouraged in May 2007 by the summit of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan in the city of Turkmenbashi. In March 2008 Turkmenistan started construction of its part of the Uzen-Gyzylgaya-Bereket-Etrek-Gorgan railway.

Bilateral contacts between Tajikistan and Iran and the contacts among the three Persian-speaking states (Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Iran) are continuing. On 25 March, 2008 in Dushanbe at the meeting of the three countries' foreign ministers the sides pledged to build a railway to connect Afghanistan and China via Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; they also undertook to join forces to build a highway from China to the Iranian port of Bandar-e' Abbas and a power line of 500 kW from Dushanbe to Afghanistan.<sup>10</sup> "Five documents were signed on 26 July in

<sup>7</sup> See: "H. Karzai odobril novyiu afghanskuiu strategiiu NATO," 7 April 2008. Source: Afghanistan.ru.

<sup>8</sup> See: "Naznachen glava Regional'nogo tsentra OON po preventivnoy diplomatii v Tsentral'noy Azii," available at [<http://www.inform.kz/showarticle.php?lang=rus&id=205468#>].

<sup>9</sup> A. Iazmuradov, op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>10</sup> "Afghanistan, Iran i Tadjikistan budut stroit' zheleznuuiu dorogu ot Afghanistana do Kitaia," available at [<http://www.intermost.ru/news/107665/>].

Dushanbe at the meeting of Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, and Afghan President Hamid Karzai: the Charter of the Coordination Intergovernmental Council on Transport Corridors and a Joint Statement, as well as memorandums of tripartite cooperation in the economic sphere and in fighting drugs and terrorism.”<sup>11</sup> On the whole over the last twelve months the talks on a possible alliance of the Persian-speaking states has become much more explicit.

The above could undermine the American efforts in Central Asia and around Iran.

4. So far the United States has failed to convince the Central Asian countries to express their public and unanimous support of the GCA project. On the one hand, the major geopolitical actors present in the area are competing for domination; on the other, America’s European allies do not associate their interests in the Caspian region (projects of alternative oil and gas pipelines to Europe across the Caucasus and Turkey—the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline to join Nabucco and the Odessa-Brody oil pipeline) with the Greater Central Asia project. The fact that the local states have the alternative of regional cooperation based on the EurAsEC, SCO, or on the purely Central Asian identity is even more important. Today they have to cope with a range of related problems and contradictions.

## Two Versions of the GCA Project—posed by the U.S. Department of State and Dr. Frederick Starr—Seen in Retrospect

Dr. Starr, Chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, made public his Greater Central Asia conception in an article that appeared in Issue 4 (July-August) 2005 of *Foreign Affairs*. Later, in October 2005, U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice outlined the idea during her visit to Kazakhstan. The State Department obviously liked it enough to appropriate it.

Closer scrutiny, however, reveals differences between the academic and diplomatic versions; the most important are outlined below.

Dr. Starr placed the stakes on closer cooperation between the Central Asian states and Afghanistan. He united them into a GCA region expected to maintain close ties with South Asia. He also envisaged a Greater Central Asia Partnership for Cooperation and Development (GCAP) for the local states; the U.S. ambassador in Kabul was to be given more powers in order to enable him to coordinate the forum and its activities (planning, coordination, and implementation of an array of U.S. programs).<sup>12</sup>

The project was to be active in the following spheres:

- Security (stronger cooperation with NATO);
- Priority development of transportation networks (particularly in the energy sphere);

<sup>11</sup> “Tajikistan posetili prezidenty Irana i Afghanistana,” 27 July 2006,” available at [<http://www.cainfo.ru/article/middle-asia-news/884/>].

<sup>12</sup> See: S. Frederick Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005 (see also: [[http://www.cfr.org/publication/8937/partnership\\_for\\_central\\_asia.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8937/partnership_for_central_asia.html)]).

- Active trade (especially in agricultural products);
- More active cooperation with the United States for the sake of stronger democracy;
- Active involvement in managing joint projects and the tasks formulated by the U.S.;
- Fighting drug trafficking;
- Development and realization of cultural and educational contacts, as well as so-called people's democracy to plant American values in the region;
- Support of the independent media.

Dr. Starr pointed out that his project was open for all countries, including Russia and China and *in the future Iran* when its domestic political situation changed and moved closer to cooperation with the world community and observation of all international agreements. This means that the author intended to build up more confidence in the relations between the West and Iran and expected to push the Iranian ruling elite toward closer cooperation with the international community.

The author insists that the war on terrorism should be advanced by building U.S.-linked security infrastructures and points out: "The GCAP should function with the same spirit of partnership. It should also be an à la carte project... The only obligatory programs should be those aimed at promoting regional and continental trade and promoting democracy."<sup>13</sup> The long-term program of transformations in the American army, structural changes, re-equipment, and novel approaches to warfare, as well as to the dislocation of American bases and military abroad, have added urgency to Washington's closer cooperation with the region's countries. Modernized American troops should be re-dislocated and/or dislocated in regions previously free from America's military presence (Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Caspian, and the Caucasus) based on small so-called "forward operating bases" (FOBs) and "forward operating locations" (FOLs) "mostly associated with the notion of more austere, scaled down, semi-permanent bases."<sup>14</sup>

Dr. Starr, in turn, suggested "expanding the responsibility of the Department of Defense's top official in Afghanistan to include the coordination of all regionwide Defense Department activities under the GCAP; and the establishment of a senior law enforcement and counternarcotics coordinator in Kabul with interagency responsibility for programs throughout the GCAP region."<sup>15</sup>

We cannot exclude the possibility that despite the fact that Washington armed itself at the state level with a somewhat moderated version of the GCA project, the theses offered by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and accepted by wider circles of the expert community might be borrowed later in the mid- and long-term perspective.

Meanwhile Dr. Laumulin (Kazakhstan) offered a highly interesting comment to the effect that the Andijan events threatened the future of the GCA project. There are indications that several years earlier (before the project's official presentation) the U.S. State Department had placed its stakes on pro-Western Uzbekistan as one of the projects's elements. It seemed that "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 cooled relations between Uzbekistan and the United States made it impossible to realize the GCA project in its initial form.<sup>16</sup> The project, however, was officially pre-

<sup>13</sup> See: S. Frederick Starr, "A Partnership for Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2005 (see also: [[http://www.cfr.org/publication/8937/partnership\\_for\\_central\\_asia.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/8937/partnership_for_central_asia.html)]).

<sup>14</sup> J. Davis, M. Sweeney, "Central Asia in U.S. Strategy and Operational Planning: Where do We Go from Here?" available at [<http://www.ifra.org/pdf/s-r-central-asia-72dpi.pdf>].

<sup>15</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> M. Laumulin, "U.S. Strategy and Policy in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (46), 2007, p. 54.

sented; the U.S. Administration, which had somewhat corrected its geopolitical strategies in the region, concentrated on Kazakhstan, which received the tag of regional driving force behind the regional integration processes within the Central Asian identity.

## Japan and the GCA Project

Today new forms of geopolitical structures and methods of their realization are being created; the leaders of the Western world and their allies (Japan, Australia, Brazil, and others) are determined to join ranks on the basis of the Western development model and the idea that they should go ahead and preserve their leading position on the international arena. They are urged by the fact that the “world without the West” slogan has been more or less widely accepted. The Western states and their allies should become more aggressive when pushing forward their geopolitical projects.

It seems that the United States, in the same way as Pakistan and India, has been working hard during the past few years to draw Japan, its main strategic ally in the APR, into the regional geopolitical struggle through the Central Asia + Japan Dialog on the strength of its strategic dependence (up to 90 percent) on energy resources from the Middle East. The Americans argued that sooner or later it might have to cope with threats to its energy security similar to those with which the United States is familiar.

It can be surmised that the Dialog’s aims, tasks, format, and positioning presuppose a new configuration of geopolitical rivalry with the SCO: the Central Asian states are SCO and CSTO members while the 2006 program of partnership within the Dialog is close to that of the SCO. At the June 2006 meeting with the Central Asian representatives held in Tokyo the official representative of Japan’s Foreign Ministry pointed out: “The SCO is developing into a bloc aimed against allied relations between Japan and the United States. It does not share our values. We shall closely follow the events.” The meeting discussed how deliveries of Asian energy resources in the “southern” direction could be diversified: from Central Asia to Pakistan (Quetta) and probably to India, from where they could be moved to Japan by sea. Experts agreed that the Tokyo meeting was carried out in the “American format and therefore was positioned as realizing an American plan of partnership with the regional states alternative to the SCO.”<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, according to the statements of the Japanese representatives that their country was prepared to help Uzbekistan (and Kazakhstan) through the Dialog project, the United States intends to link Uzbekistan (indirectly) to the regional Greater South Asia (Greater Central Asia) project. Today the political context excludes a direct dialog.

## GCA’s Place in Kazakhstan’s Policies

In recent years the GCA project has run up against serious contradictions; the political and expert communities are growing increasingly critical about the project and doubt its expediency. On the whole, America’s strategy in Central Asia has lost its impact; Washington has become deeply engrossed

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<sup>17</sup> A.I. Iskandarov, “Novye integratsionnye initsiativy v Tsentral’noaziatskom regione v usloviakh sovremennoy geopolitiki,” *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 2, 2007, p. 28.



in other Eurasian areas: the Middle East, the Black Sea area, Eastern Europe, and the Caucasus. The rising cost of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan depletes the country's financial resources. This explains why Central Asia has been dropped, at least temporarily, from the list of America's priorities. For some time it will remain a derivative of America's policies in the Middle East, Russia, China, and the Caucasus and their dynamics.

There is an understanding in Washington that Central Asia and Afghanistan are not yet ready to accept the GCA project. This means that in the near future Washington will work toward creating the necessary conditions and developing them before moving on to the project's midterm perspective.

This means that America will move toward the aims and tasks formulated by the GCA project little by little, even in the long-term perspective. The present lull might be unexpectedly replaced with America's activation in the region if the geopolitical and geoeconomic conditions change.

So far the Central Asian states do not regard the GCA project as an alternative to their cooperation with Russia and China. The project's force might be demonstrated through its weakness. It might be promoted within the policy of diversification of international contacts and vectors carried out by the Central Asian countries if China and Russia gain too much power (especially in view of the negative trends revealed by Russia's policies during the South Ossetian crisis).

Within the GCA project Washington is displaying a latent interest in the regional project to create an Alliance of the Central Asian States; it probably approved of it because its format corresponds to America's desire to set up a regional structure (aimed at pushing China and Russia aside) with a good integration potential which the Americans could use as their regional partner. In future this project could be regarded, at least theoretically, as the cornerstone of a new regional structure similar to that presented as the GCA project; it could be used to suppress Chinese and Russian influence in the region.

It is equally important to identify the forms and spheres of cooperation (within the GCA project) which generate minimum political and economic risks. Some of the transit (including energy) corridors could be developed in the South Asian direction if the governments of Afghanistan and the United States, the international community, and specialized (insurance and other security structures) institutions supplied at least partial guarantees of their safety. It should be taken into account that "the choice of a specific route for a pipeline depends on the coordinated interests of the following groups: the exporter countries, the oil companies that work at the fields, and the importer and transit countries."<sup>18</sup>

It is not easy to identify the cooperation priorities: development of the social infrastructure and trade with Afghanistan and the South Asian countries involves great risks, especially in the social security sphere. A ramified network of energy corridors involves greater risks in the economic security sphere, which means that the special state structures of Kazakhstan should carefully verify the facts and supply detailed analysis.

Today, when the largest world actors present in the region have officially accepted Kazakhstan as the region's leader and strategic partner with sufficient political weight, it has become extremely important to clarify its relations with the SCO and the Western security structures present in the region. Kazakhstan might promote the idea of a new mechanism of cooperation and/or dialog among the security structures (NATO, SCO, and CSTO). This has become especially important today: the world political and economic systems are no longer what they were and are still in the process of changing while the states are looking for new models, forms, and formats of international cooperation. This is happening at a pace that makes detailed comprehension impossible. Responses should be

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<sup>18</sup> N.K. Nadirov, *Tengiz—more nefiti, more problem*, NITs Gylym Publishers, Almaty, 2003, p. 164.

dynamic while thinking must be preventive. Kazakhstan's initiatives can, to a certain extent, return the geopolitical rivalry in the region to a constructive sphere for the sake of continued geopolitical balance. Indeed, sooner or later the regional security systems will have to identify the level and sphere of their cooperation.

Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship in 2010 will give it a chance to attract European (and international) attention to the region's sores (Afghanistan and security threats) in order to create new approaches to regional security. On the other hand, the official framework of cooperation with the OSCE structure provides the country with an opportunity to implement the regional development projects and the security initiatives on the border with Afghanistan.

### *C o n c l u s i o n s*

1. The U.S. academic community has a much more profound idea about the GCA project designed to expand and promote cooperation among the Central Asian, Middle Eastern, and South Asian states than the U.S. State Department. In the absence of real progress in its relations with Iran Washington is concentrating on the project's practical economic and military expediency. It intends to merge Central and South Asia into a single region.
2. The GCA project presupposes that the local countries will be incorporated into the global West-dominated economic and financial structures. The current world financial and economic crisis, however, dictates caution when it comes to incorporation into the world economy.
3. The problems that interfere with America's intention to implement the GCA project have not, and will not, remove the issue from Washington's geopolitical agenda: it is a mid- and long-term project.
4. The new American initiatives for the region (of a local and global nature) might be presented in a different context and will, in one way or another, comprise GCA elements.
5. So far cooperation within the GCA project remains passive since the United States is still preoccupied with the domestic developments in Afghanistan, the Iraqi file, the Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, the world financial, economic, and political crises, the Caucasus, and adaptation of the new U.S. administration to the new foreign policy environment. Russia and China are firmly opposed to the project, which inevitably affects the local policies; the Central Asian countries are demonstrating no unanimity when it comes to cooperation and regional unity. The project designed for the long term, however, is still alive.
6. The GCA project is a geopolitical dimension of the CA + the Caucasus Project functioning within the Silk Road initiative. On the other hand, they compete with one another when it comes to the transportation of resources. On the whole, however, they are being implemented in the context of America's interests, which presupposes controlled geopolitical pluralism in the region.
7. The American regional initiatives have gone beyond the GCA project; in the future they will be realized within the already functioning bilateral agreements and projects. Military cooperation, in particular, is being realized by the U.S. Central Command and NATO. The latter's involvement in the region's socioeconomic development means that the Alliance, as a military bloc, has exceeded the limits of its competence. NATO is using security rhetoric to become involved in the region's socioeconomic and political spheres. In the absence of the GCA

project as a real institutionalized integration structure NATO and CSTO remain, and will remain in the foreseeable future, the key Western institutionalized structures involved in the integration efforts within GCA.

8. America's new geopolitical approaches are concentrated on reorienting the region's infrastructure toward South Asia with a special emphasis on the energy corridors; they are seen as a factor of mid- and long-term success in Afghanistan and America's geopolitical breakthroughs in the Caspian. Washington intends to preserve or even fortify its position and adjust the local countries' foreign policy preferences to its interests.
9. The GCA project is the U.S.'s systemic matrix in the region, which determines the aims, tasks, ways, and methods Washington can employ in the new conditions. Its great scope and the somewhat simplified American approach notwithstanding, the task calls for constant analysis and monitoring in the new and far from simple political and geopolitical reality.
10. In view of the fact that, judging by the remarks dropped by leading experts, the project was first geared toward Uzbekistan as the key country and driving force behind integration of Central Asia and Afghanistan, we can expect that the sides will soon restore their strategic relations. This is Uzbekistan's only chance to regain its place among the region's leaders; its present isolation from the West undermines its political influence. America, in turn, is seeking restored relations with Uzbekistan in view of its geostrategic importance in the continued counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan. This explains why in 2007 and 2008 the sides largely revived their bilateral contacts.<sup>19</sup> Contacts in the military sphere were successfully reanimated when "Tashkent allowed the United States to share the base in Termez with the German Air Force in order to move its military to Afghanistan."<sup>20</sup> The expert community is convinced that the Americans will soon return to the Karshy-Khanabad base.
11. Dr. Starr's conception and the official GCA project have at least two important things in common: development of transport corridors in the South Asian direction and making Afghanistan the connecting link between Central and South Asia at some time in the future.

On the whole, the GCA project is part of Washington's vaster strategic plans designed to transform the Eurasian continent (including the Caspian region, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia) into a geoeconomic expanse controlled by the United States. Potentially this may create a "sanitary cordon" along the Russian (southern) and Chinese (northern) borders while the geopolitical field of regional rivalry could be extended to suit American interests.

On the whole, America's Central Asian policy has acquired its conceptual framework in the form of the GCA project. The recent Caucasian developments (the so-called South Ossetian conflict) greatly changed world and regional policies. The changing global political and economic systems (which

<sup>19</sup> The following recent visits testify that bilateral contacts were stirred up: Deputy Assistant of U.S. Secretary of State E. Feigenbaum visited Uzbekistan on 28 February-5 March, 2007; Deputy Coordinator at the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State J. Garvey came on 3-5 April, 2007; U.S. Ambassador to the OCSE J. Finley on 15-17 March, 2007; U.S. Department of State Assistant Coordinator in the Europe/Eurasia Bureau T. Adams on 3-4 June, 2007; Ambassador-at-Large for the Office of International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State J. Hanford on 25-29 June, 2007; Director, Strategy, Plans and Policy, U.S. Central Command Rear-Admiral J. Miller on 20-22 December, 2007; Commander of the U.S. Central Command Admiral W. Fallon on 24-25 January, 2008; Acting Deputy Assistant U.S. Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs P. Spratlen on 28 March-1 April, 2008 (see: *Uzbeksko-amerikansk-  
ie otnoshenia. Ministerstvo inostrannykh del Respubliki Uzbekistan*, available at [[http://mfa.uz/rus/mej\\_sotr/  
uzbekistan\\_i\\_strani\\_mira/uzbekistan\\_strani\\_ameriki/](http://mfa.uz/rus/mej_sotr/uzbekistan_i_strani_mira/uzbekistan_strani_ameriki/)]).

<sup>20</sup> A. Dubnov, "Tashkent shagaet 'pozitivno'," 18 March 2008, available at [[http://zarubejom.ru/v-nomere/5-ballov/  
?id=11180](http://zarubejom.ru/v-nomere/5-ballov/?id=11180)].

keep the Western countries in a state of turbulence) offered the Western bloc a new role and forced it to seek the best possible means to remain afloat. This means that the West will step up its regional geopolitical involvement. The Caucasus is a case in point. I have not posed myself the task of discussing the impact of the Caucasian development on the future of America's Central Asian strategy. That subject deserves a separate article.