

## REGIONAL POLITICS

**FROM INTERNAL TO EXTERNAL:  
CHALLENGES AGAINST  
U.S.'S CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY**

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With the 9/11 event as the baseline, America's awareness of the strategic importance of Central Asia and the latter's weight in the U.S. global strategy was greatly changed. According to Charles Manes, the 9/11 terrorist attack enabled the U.S. to "discover Central Asia."<sup>1</sup> This attack has straightened out the uncertainty due to confusion within the U.S. Government about the importance of the Central Asian area to the U.S. and enabled the U.S. to suddenly realize the important advantage of the five Central Asian nations in the global geopolitical pat-

tern. However, the sympathy of the Central Asian nations, Russia and China for the U.S. on the terrorist attack and the warm help from the Central Asian nations to U.S.'s Taliban attacks in Afghanistan and to the U.S. military actions against al-Qa'eda, facilitated the U.S. army in Central Asia to gain the Manas Air Base and the Karshi Khana-bad Airport (also called K2 Base). This symbolized a turning point for the U.S. to access the Central Asian area in one stroke. By stationing in Central Asia, the U.S. became a remarkably important power in Central Asia and nearby.

In terms of strategy, the U.S. is very far away from Central Asia. However, judging from the undergoing Afghanistan Action of Antiterrorism

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Manes, "America Discovers Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 2, March/April 2003, pp. 120-132.

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and the U.S. military bases in Central Asia, the five Central Asian nations have actually fallen into the U.S. "New Frontier" category.<sup>2</sup> This was the first time for the U.S. to observe and influence the Central Asian situation so closely. Surprisingly, the happening of the Kyrgyz "Tulip Revolution" in March 2005 and the Uzbekistan Andijan event in May of the same year interrupted the accelerating the U.S. influence in Central Asia. Although the U.S. kept its Manas Air Base in the end, Kyrgyzstan failed to observe the Kyrgyzstan-American Goodwill Policy after the "Tulip Revolution" and it vacillated on the U.S. stationing issue, which remained a headache to the U.S.<sup>3</sup> The development of the Andijan event further led the U.S. to realize the complexity of the Central Asian situation. After the Andijan event, the U.S. Government required the Karimov Government to allow the international commission of inquiry to stand firm on the independence, which forced the U.S. army to withdraw from the Karshi Khana-bad Airport on 21 November, 2005. The withdrawal of the U.S. army from Uzbekistan symbolized a great setback of the Central Asian policy,

<sup>2</sup> See: Maj. V. de Kytspotter, *The Very Great Game? The U.S. New Frontier in Central Asia*, A Research Paper Presented to the Geneva Centre for Security Policy 18th International Training Course, February 2004, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> See: J. Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report Order Code RL30294, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Updated 26 April, 2007, pp. 34, 35.

which is regarded as a "Strategic Surprise" for the U.S. in Central Asia.<sup>4</sup>

In order to turn the decreasing U.S. influence around in Central Asia, the U.S. Government has been adjusting its Central Asian policy ever since the second half of 2005. The aim of this paper is to outline the profound background of the above-mentioned adjustment by means of a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced by the U.S. in Central Asia ever since 2005 and the causes of these challenges. At the same time, we will take the scholastic controversy over the priority of the U.S.'s Central Asian strategic goals after the Andijan event for example to point out the existing internal controversy over U.S.'s Central Asian strategy. As such controversy results from the above-mentioned strategic challenges against the U.S. in Central Asia and reflects a scholastically serious thinking on its Central Asian strategy, a deep study of such controversy is closely linked with a study of the strategic challenges against the U.S. in the Central Asian area. It begins with a comprehensive analysis of the internal and external challenges against the U.S. in Central Asia, and then shifts to the vision of the internal controversy over U.S. Central Asian strategy and summarizes the present situation and the future development of U.S. Central Asian strategy.

<sup>4</sup> See: St.J. Blank, "Strategic Surprise? Central Asia in 2006," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 2, May 2006, pp. 109-130.

## The Internal Challenges against the U.S. Central Asian Strategy

In general, the strategic setback of the U.S. in Central Asia is due to both internal and external reasons. The internal factors mainly include the numerous mistakes of the U.S. Government's Central Asian policy itself; while the external factors mainly involve the subjective attitudes or objective factors of the countries interacting with the U.S. in Central Asia. We must point out that the above internal and external factors are both causes of the U.S. strategic loss and the obstacle to the fulfillment of the U.S. strategic goal. The two are actually in conformity.

Although the U.S. Government has not yet declared that its Central Asian policy is seriously defective, academe is well aware of these deficiencies, pointing that out as one of the factual groundings for the adjustment of its Central Asian policy. Concerned scholars suggested that one of the main

reasons for the U.S. to be confronted with such incidents in the Central Asian area is the weakening of the U.S.'s strategic status as the "Strategic Surprise". These are resulting from the limitations in the U.S. Central Asian policy itself, which have become one of the challenges to be overcome so that the U.S. can achieve its goals in its Central Asian strategy. Judging from the conclusion and analysis of scholars' discussions about U.S.'s Central Asian policy, they stress the following three serious mistakes in U.S.'s Central Asian policy: the U.S. has neglected the internal coordination between government agencies when handling the Central Asian affairs, has lacked a good understanding of the Central Asian nations and the whole area in general and neglected the external coordination with other players.

### ***Lack of Coordination between Government Agencies when Handling the Central Asian Affairs***

Prior to the Andijan event in 2005, suggestions on reviewing the limitations of the Uzbekistan policy and even of the whole Central Asian policy by the U.S. had already existed. Among the problems identified were the lack of effective coordination between the U.S. government agencies is the most serious one. Someone pointed out that there was serious competition and controversy between sectors within the Government, which are the greatest obstacle to the government agencies' coordination and cooperation.<sup>5</sup> On the Central Asian policy, the most remarkable competition and controversy between government sectors was between the Department of State and the Defense Department. With reference to the power struggle, Stephen J. Blank points out that the Pentagon tends to seek a greater control of the U.S. office of foreign affairs by all means, even taking a hard line in so doing. Then government officers giving each other "tit for tat" will be unable to make consistent policies. As for the Department of State, to preserve the U.S. interest, realizing democratization and democracy are taken for granted as the utmost value. What they are most concerned about in the Central Asian area is democracy but not security interests, so they don't agree on any other alternative (except democracy).<sup>6</sup> The Department of Defense suggests that the U.S.'s preferred strategic consideration in Central Asia should be antiterrorism wars for regional security, while the Department of State regards promoting democracy in the Central Asian area as the priority. With such notable controversy, the two government sectors often have serious conflicts on some matters instead of cooperation or coordination on the U.S.'s Central Asian policy.

The policy controversy between the Department of Defense and the Department of State is reflected most vividly and sharply by their different attitudes to helping the Central Asian nations. On 13 April, Richard A. Boucher (former spokesman of the Department of State and currently the Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs) declared that due to "Uzbekistan's balking on democratic reform and the U.S. restriction on helping its partners," the U.S. would cancel the economic and military aid amounting to 18 million U.S. dollars to Uzbekistan. The senior officers in the Defense Department gave air to their grievances on this decision. When visiting Uzbekistan in August 2004, Richard Myers (then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) declared that while Russia was trying to enhance its influence on Uzbekistan, it was "shortsighted" and "non-constructive" for the U.S. to reduce its aid to Uzbekistan.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See: T. Clancy *et al.*, *Battle Ready*, G.P. Putnam's & Sons, New York, 2004, pp. 323-324.

<sup>6</sup> See: St.J. Blank, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them*, Strategic Studies Institute, March 2007, p. 19, available at [<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=758>].

<sup>7</sup> See: J. Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report Order Code IB93108, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., 10 December, 2004, CRS-20.

In fact, the lack of consensus and coordination between sectors within the Government on a series of Central Asian affairs of strategic importance has greatly decreased the complementation efficiency of U.S.'s Central Asian policy and even affected the general physiognomy of the Central Asian policy. Many scholars propose that the inter-sector conflict is a structural problem of U.S.'s Central Asian policy, which has become an obstacle to making consistent and effective Central Asian policies and to giving flexible and quick response upon contingency by the U.S. After the Andijan event, the U.S. had to withdraw from Karshi Khanabad Airport, which is interpreted as a failure of the Central Asian policy due to the lack of coordination between agencies in charge of the Central Asian affairs in the U.S.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Lack of a Good Understanding of the Actual Demands from the Central Asian Nations***

The disputes and "short-sightedness" within the U.S. government sectors were the result of their ignorance of the exceptional cases of the Central Asian nations when making their Central Asian policy. They hardly considered the Central Asian nations' real concerns and actual needs in the latter's position. In addition, the implementation of the Central Asian policy is influenced by the domestic election cycle. To cater to criticism from domestic voters on U.S. foreign policies and the demands from powerful lobbying groups for their own interests, the Government had to sacrifice important national interests for voters' support of its foreign policies sometimes. How the Government handled the Andijan event is a good example.

After the Andijan event happened on 13 May, 2005, the media and human rights activists didn't make any in-depth investigation before blaming the Uzbekistan Karimov Government for its abuse of force on those protesting against it, which led to heavy casualties. High-ranking governmental officers also suggested that the U.S. should be tough on Uzbekistan. Under such circumstances, the U.S. Government had to impose pressure on the Karimov Government, requiring Uzbekistan to allow it to set up an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate the truth of the Andijan event. The U.S. Government's standpoint on the Andijan event led to worsening the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship.

Four years have passed since the Andijan event. A second review of the U.S. Government's response to this incident is suggested. For instance, with reference to the criticism from some government and nongovernmental organizations on the Uzbekistan human rights and democracy, S. Frederick Starr, Director of the Johns Hopkins Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, used to point out: "Criticism by certain NGOs and some U.S. government agencies of Uzbekistan's record in the area of human rights, whatever their justification, will raise a caution flag in the U.S. These concerns cannot be ignored, but they must be addressed in the context of certain positive developments that have gone largely unreported."<sup>9</sup> However, up until now, the domestic mainstream's opinions have placed the blame on the Uzbekistan Government for its repression of domestic democracy and its extreme ignorance of human rights regardless of the new views some independent researchers have on the standpoint of the Uzbekistan Government in this event by means of detailed and objective investigation. And after detailed

<sup>8</sup> See: St.J. Blank, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them*, pp. 18-22. It is important to note that it was the U.S. Congress that established new legislative conditions on aid to Uzbekistan (tied to human rights), which led to the curtailment of some aid.

<sup>9</sup> S.F. Starr, *A "Greater Central Asia Partnership" for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, Washington, D.C., 2005, p. 21.

investigation, AbduMannob Polat pointed out that the Uzbekistan Government's response to the Andijan event was actually very restrained. At that time, in order to prevent Uzbekistan from coming to serious anarchy, use of force was almost the only choice for Karimov. And the Government's over-reaction to this event was mostly due to the domestic groups' campaign and hostility to the Karimov regime.<sup>10</sup> It is said that the U.S. Government's standpoint on the Andijan event shows its lack of enough deep understanding of Uzbekistan and even the whole Central Asian nations' national conditions and its controversy with Central Asia over priority.<sup>11</sup>

On the Government's agenda of the Central Asian policy, in order to reduce the security threats in the Central Asian area, driving by all means the Central Asian nations to make necessary political and economic reforms to promote democracy and liberty is the obligatory diplomatic mission for the U.S. To the Central Asian nations, which are still at the transitional stage, the most important and most urgent task at present is to promote the national economic development and create a stable domestic environment. The two interacting sides have different understandings of the preferred development orientation for the Central Asian nations. This will lead to difficulty in the development of good relations between the U.S. and the Central Asian nations. To the people in the Central Asian nations, they seem to look forward to a change but not political reform. What they most care about is not political liberty and democracy but the improvement of their own economic conditions. According to the polls jointly taken by the World Bank, the UNDP and the Brookings Institution in the fall of 2004 on the five Central Asian nations, what the Uzbekistan people were worried about was unemployment, poverty and political unrest. From the matters the U.S. Government especially cared about, such as media liberty and political rights, the Uzbekistan people didn't expect much.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Lack of External Coordination in Making and Implementing the U.S. Central Asian Policy***

Central Asia is a gathering place for great power interests, which is already a consensus to both authorities and academe. In addition, Central Asian nations face many problems during this transition, such as solving the border problems, beating drug traffic, trading in human beings, eliminating organized crime, restricting the development of the Islamic extremist forces, allocating water resources rationally, leading Central Asian nations to fully melt into the global economic system and handling the sudden political unrest in Central Asia, which all demand for the interaction and coordination between the external behavior bodies devoted actively to the Central Asian affairs. However, while pursuing its own strategic interests in such a critical area, the U.S. Government seldom communicates with such countries as Russia, China and Iran on the Central Asian area affairs and its Central Asian policy.<sup>13</sup> Just as an observer says "present policies and structures [of the U.S.], while fundamentally bilateral, nonetheless allow a degree of cross-border coordination and integration."<sup>14</sup> Although the

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<sup>10</sup> See: A. Polat, *Reassessing Andijan: The Road to Restoring U.S.-Uzbek Relations*, Jamestown Foundation, Washington, D.C., June 2007.

<sup>11</sup> See: V. Naumkin, "Uzbekistan's State-Building Fatigue," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 138-139.

<sup>12</sup> See: F. Hill, K. Jones, "Fear of Democracy or Revolution: The Reaction to Andijan," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 119.

<sup>13</sup> See: S.N. Macfarlane, "The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia," *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 2004, pp. 450-461; R. Weitz, "Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Summer 2006, pp. 155-167.

<sup>14</sup> S.F. Starr, op. cit., p. 11.

U.S. policy makers stress the importance of regional economic and security cooperation sometimes, what the U.S. is concerned about in Central Asia is bilateral on the whole—ever since 2001, this tendency has become more and more obvious.<sup>15</sup>

The U.S. Government's stress on the bilateralism has greatly helped develop the relations between the U.S. and the Central Asian nations. However, with the U.S.'s lack of necessary interaction and coordination in Central Asia, the U.S. Government's policies will be subject to misunderstanding, which will objectively result in the complicity of the Central Asian situation. In fact, the nations with important and even core interests in Central Asia are mainly Russia and China. If the U.S. Government pays little attention to the effective interaction with these two nations, the U.S. will get hurt in pursuit of its own interests. It is said that as the main large nations in the world have all taken an active part in Central Asian affairs for their own interests, Central Asia has been put in a "New Great Game" whirlpool more complicated than the "Great Game" in the 19th Century.<sup>16</sup> Of course, in view of their own interests, Russia and China are keeping sharp vigilance on the expansion of U.S. influence in this area, but it is still necessary for the U.S. Government to make some basic communication with the two nations by all means on the important issues happening in the Central Asian nations. It does not mean giving in to Russia and China or empowering them to exaggerate their own power and influence in Central Asia. Actually, for the sake of the U.S. interests, the U.S. Government must set up a kind and easy-going image in the Central Asian area to make time with the Central Asian nations and enable Russia and China to realize that the U.S. is actually not pursuing its own interests in an exclusive way.

There is still a lot of work to do toward that end. Its current Central Asian policy is dominated by bilateral relations, which is seen to be a lack of flexibility. In addition, the U.S. seldom communicates with such countries as Russia, which has become an excuse for them to attack the U.S. Government's policy with words. NATO, for example, used to blame the U.S. Government for its lack of clarity and coordination with other large nations on Central Asian policy. Up to now, NATO has deeply involved itself in Afghanistan military action and the military contacts with Central Asia. However, NATO has not done much to set up a necessary link or an effective dialog mechanism with Russia or China. Furthermore, the U.S. has never responded actively to the appeal that China and Russia are willing to enhance their cooperation with NATO. For instance, in October 2002, officers from the Chinese Government appealed to NATO to begin a bilateral dialog with China on the strategic development and security threats of Central Asia, but NATO didn't make any necessary response to this advocacy. In addition, in the past years, Russia has kept suggesting that NATO and CSTO set up a direct link on many domains related to Central Asia, such as beating terrorism and drug traffic. However, NATO tended to cooperate bilaterally with Central Asian nations and turned Russia down repeatedly. Why did the Government refuse Russia? Because it thought that the organization was controlled by Russia, so that setting up a relationship with CSTO would mean to admit the legality of the organization in the international community.<sup>17</sup> Since the Government does not trust such large nations as Russia and Iran, it is unwilling to negotiate or communicate with them on the Central Asian affairs and its own Central Asian policy. The focus of the U.S. Government on the bilateral relationship in the Central Asian area facilitates the stability of the

<sup>15</sup> See: S.N. Macfarlane, op. cit., p. 457.

<sup>16</sup> See: *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia*, ed. by L. Klevevan, Atlantic Books, London, 2004; N. Swanström, "China and Central Asia: A New Great Game or Traditional Vassal Relations?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 45, No. 12, November 2005, pp. 569-584; M.K. Bhadrakumar, "The Great Game on a Razor's Edge," *Asian Times Online*, 23 December, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See: R. Weitz, op. cit., p.164. Perhaps there is more potential for dialogue with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization than with the CSTO.

situation of the area and of the political situation of the Central Asian nations. However, to other countries, the U.S. is a potential power to damage the stability of Central Asia.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is time for the Government to change this policy.

## The External Challenges against U.S.'s Central Asian Policy

Under new situations, the U.S. must overcome both the inherent structural contradictions of its policy and the following main external challenges. The first challenge is the Central Asian nations' doubt and distrust of the U.S. for promoting democracy in the Central Asian area, the second one is Russia, which disagrees and will resist the U.S., and the third one is Afghanistan, which is highly expected but not capable enough to undertake the heavy task in terms of security situations and its geopolitical location. These three external challenges actually result from the mistakes of the U.S.'s Central Asian strategy, and their existence and development has become an obstacle to the success of the U.S.'s Central Asian strategy.

### **Central Asian Nations' Doubting about the U.S. Strategic Intentions**

In advance of antiterrorism, the U.S. army stationed troops in the Central Asian area smoothly. From 2001 to 2003, the U.S. Government's main tasks in the Central Asian area were to consolidate the gained military bases and enhance its own strategic status in this area. Therefore, the U.S. Government has not interfered in the political and economic reforms of the Central Asian nations enthusiastically. In 2003, especially after issuing the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism (NSCT), the Government began to show its dissatisfaction with the stagnation of the political and economic reforms in Central Asian nations. According to NSCT, the internal development of the allies or partners of the U.S. was vital to the U.S. war of antiterrorism. If these countries are already or are becoming the so-called "weak nations" or "failed states," even if the U.S. can get temporary benefit from cooperation with them, these nations, that are subject to terrorists, will bring the U.S. antiterrorism action into trouble and even threaten the U.S. national security in the long run. To make the national war of antiterrorism successful, NSCT defined the following four goals: uproot terrorism; stop giving support, help or refuge to terrorists; eliminate the potential condition for the breeding of terrorism; defend the security of the U.S. and of its citizens both at home and abroad.<sup>19</sup> However, according to the Government's policy makers, the Central Asian nations, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, tend to be changed into "failed nations" in view of the complicity and difficulties of the transition process of the Central Asian nations.<sup>20</sup> And this is a consideration for the Government in making its Central Asian policy and to developing its cooperation with these nations.

<sup>18</sup> See: Maj. V. de Kytspotter, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> See: "President Bush Releases National Strategy for Combating Terrorism," Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, available at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030214-7.html>].

<sup>20</sup> According to Graham Fuller, former Vice-chairman of the U.S. National Security Council, the so-called "Failed States" are those "suffering from breakdown in national authority and legal norm and lost of control on governments by the Central Government, resulting in increasing anarchy, law disorder and crimes" (G. Fuller, *The Future of Political Islam*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, p. 76).

As is described in relevant documents and works by the Government and scholars, the Central Asian nations were confronted with a series of problems during transition, such as serious corruption, slow economic recovery, serious unemployment problems, sharp polarization between the rich and the poor, a prevailing shadow economy, rise of Islamic extremism, brutalities of terrorist attacks, rampancy of drug traffic, weak military force and low efficiency of governments. According to the U.S., these problems are so serious that the actually weak nations are only a step away from "failed nations."<sup>21</sup> In order to help the Central Asian nations combat these internal challenges, the U.S. Government's recommendation to the Central Asian nations are implementing practical political and economic reforms with democracy and liberal economic values. In fact, the Government did not stress this problem from the beginning. Before 2003, although the Government required the Central Asian nations to begin political and economic reforms, it focused on developing friendly relations with them and driving them to support its military action in Afghanistan, paying little attention to this problem.<sup>22</sup> However, ever since 2003, the U.S. Government had begun to impose more pressure on the political and economic reforms in Central Asian nations. Especially after the Rose Revolution happening in Georgia in November 2003, the Orange Revolution happening in Ukraine in October 2004 and the Tulip Revolution happening in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, the U.S. Government suddenly saw a good prospect in the former Soviet area and expected a lot from the emergence of democracy in Central Asia. Just based on this judgment the U.S. Government took a hard line after the Andijan event, which worsened the relationship between the U.S. and the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The Government's response to the Andijan event has a lot of impacts. First, it reminded the state leaders of the Central Asian nations that the U.S. Government won't give up the promotion of democracy even in its allies, including Uzbekistan, which has signed a strategic agreement with the U.S.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, the U.S. Government's attitude toward the democratic problem in Central Asia and its disregard of the development of democracy in its allied nations in the Middle East and the Africa. The state leaders of the Central Asian nations have blamed the U.S. Government for its "Double Standards" for democracy.<sup>24</sup> Lastly, it has led to a misunderstanding by the state leaders of the Central Asian nations that promoting democracy would lead to a Color Revolution, resulting in a downfall or banishment of the state leaders. Based on these judgments, the state leaders of the Central Asian nations think that promoting democracy domestically is equal to political suicide. The response of Karimov (President of Uzbekistan) to the U.S. attitude after the Andijan event exemplifies how these state leaders' fear the U.S. democratic strategy and voice dissatisfaction with the U.S. attitude. In view of the experience of the Central Asian nations interacting with the U.S. in recent years and the state leaders' understanding of the impact of so many Color Revolutions, the above-mentioned influences might remain in the state leaders' cognition of the U.S. Since the Central Asian nations' misgivings about the U.S.'s intentions would not disappear quickly, it seems that the U.S. Government should enhance its communication with the governments of these nations before making its Central Asian policy, so as to improve its image in this area.

<sup>21</sup> J. Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report Order Code RL33458, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Update 12 May, 2006.

<sup>22</sup> See: M.B. Olcott, "Taking Stock of Central Asia," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Spring 2003, pp. 3-17; F. Hill, "Central Asia and the Caucasus: The Impact of the War on Terrorism," in: *Nations in Transit 2003: Democratization in East-Central Europe and Eurasia*, ed. by A. Schnetzer et al., Liberty House, New York, 2003; A. Tabyshalieva, "Human Rights and Democratization in Central Asia After September 11," *Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Insights*, December 2002.

<sup>23</sup> See: E. Rumer, "The U.S. Interests and Role in Central Asia After K2," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 3, Summer 2006, p. 148.

<sup>24</sup> See: V. Naumkin, op. cit., pp. 138-139; F. Hill, K. Jones, op. cit., p. 122.



***Russia's Resistance against  
the Increased U.S. Influence  
in the Central Asian Area***

It is undeniable that Russia used to have a lasting and deep influence in Central Asia, which was somewhat weakened after the Soviet Union collapsed due to a drop in Russian strength and a shift of its democratic strategy toward the West, but the historical ties between Russia and the Central Asian nations have not disappeared with the Soviet Union. After the 9/11 attack in 2001, holding common interests with the U.S. on attacking the Afghanistan Taliban Regime, eliminating Afghanistan drug production, weakening Islamic extremism and maintaining the Central Asia's stability, the Russian Putin Government silently accepted the fact that the U.S. troops entered Central Asia. Furthermore, Russia even cooperated with Central Asian nations to support the U.S. military action in Afghanistan by providing military equipment and advisers.<sup>25</sup> Although this attitude somewhat relieved the competition between the U.S. and Russia as early as the 1990s, as time passed and the situation changed, Russia began to be dissatisfied with the increasing U.S. influence in Central Asia and reviewed the impact the U.S. military existence would have on the strategic interests of the Central Asian area.

The stationing of the U.S. army in Central Asia changed the previous friendliness of Central Asia to Russia—even Tajikistan, which had an intimate relationship with Russia, is now seeking a balance between Russia and U.S.—which somewhat depresses Russia. The emergence of the U.S. army has made Russia feel its strategic interests in Central Asia are restricted by the U.S. As discussed above, the U.S. Government cooperates with Central Asian nations with bilateralism as the core, which has also dissatisfied Russia. In addition, Russia has linked the U.S. with the Color Revolution to convince the Central Asian nations that the U.S. is playing a role in it, so as to increase their vigilance against the U.S. In order to maintain its own interest in Central Asia and the attachment of the Central Asian nations to it, Russia has taken a series of actions in the following fields in recent years to prevent the U.S. influence from spreading in the Central Asian area.

**Security:** At the CIS Summit in May 2001, the members agreed on the establishment of the Central Asia Quick Reaction Force (QRF) with its headquarters in Bishkek; in May 2002, the Collective Security Treaty was upgraded to be the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which stated Russia's desire that all external forces stationing troops in Central Asia must "meet Russian interest and coordinate with it."<sup>26</sup> B. On 23 October, 2003, Russia obtained the right to station troops in the Kant Air Base near Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, which was the first air base Russia obtained in Central Asia after the Soviet Union collapsed. C. In October 2004, Russia and Tajikistan signed the Credential Exchange Protocol on ratifying the Treaty on the Status and Conditions of Stay of the Russian Military Base in the territory of Tajikistan (signed on 16 April, 1999), thus reconstituting the 201st Motorized Infantry Division Russia stationed in Tajikistan into a military base formally. On 22 September, 2003, Russia and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement titled Russia and Kyrgyzstan on the Status and Terms of Stationing the Russian Airbase in Kyrgyzstan. Under the agreement, the Russian airbase Kant, including its materiel, is part of the air arm of the Collective Rapid Deployment Force in the Central Asian region. D. After the Andijan event in 2005, the Uzbekistan-Russian relationship was developed quickly. In September 2005, the two nations held the first military exercise after the Soviet Union collapsed. In November of the same year, they signed The Russia-

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<sup>25</sup> See: J. Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report Order Code RL30294, Washington, D.C., CRS-44, 46.

<sup>26</sup> R. Weitz, op. cit., pp. 157-158; St.J. Blank, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them*, pp. 5-15.

Uzbekistan Treaty of Alliance Relations, which symbolized the establishment of a formal military alliance between the two nations.

**Energy resources dimension:**<sup>27</sup> A. Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan established the “Natural Gas Alliance” in 2002. On 28 February, 2003, EAEC<sup>28</sup> International Council declared the “EAEC Member States’ Energy Resources Policies and Principle”; B. In October 2004, Russia joined the CACO consisting of Uzbekistan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan,<sup>29</sup> which was originally devoted to getting rid of the Russian influence to promote the economic integration in Central Asia. Russia’s entry put the Central Asian nations’ desire to exclude Russia from the regional integration process to an end. C. In October 2005, at the EAEC St. Petersburg Summit, CACO announced its merger with EAEC, when all its members joined in EAEC. Hence the Russian influence on the Central Asian nations was further consolidated. D. After the Andijan event, the former EAEC Observer Uzbekistan joined this organization formally on 25 January, 2006. Why was this event so significant in the field of energy resources? Because as early as the organization allowed for its entry, Uzbekistan signed an agreement with Russian Gazprom on the investment of 1.2 billion U.S. dollars in the three largest natural gas fields (Urga, Kuanysh and Akchalak) on the Ustyurt Plateau in Uzbekistan to produce petroleum together, so as to imitate Russia.<sup>30</sup> In fact, this component is broader than just energy. It is economic, which includes energy but also prosperity/economic development for the nations of the region and also the South-Central Asia regional integration initiative which is referred to later in the paper.

**Democracy:** A. Learning from the lessons of the great loss due to its obvious support of Yanukovich during the Orange Revolution happening in Ukraine in October 2004—Russia gave priority to maintaining the stability of the Kyrgyzstan situation during the Tulip Revolution happening in March 2005. This was to prevent the new Kyrgyzstan Government from estranging it when in power; B. During the Andijan event in May 2005 Russia strongly protested against the intervention by the U.S. and EU in the internal affairs of Uzbekistan, publicly supporting the standpoint of the Karimov Government in the Andijan event and supported the Uzbekistan Government in refusing the U.S.’s suggestion regarding setting up an international fact-finding commission in the name of maintaining the Uzbekistan sovereignty. C. To go against the U.S. intention for a Color Revolution in the Central Asian area, Russia gave great support to the governments of the Central Asian nations by means of high-level visits, governmental statements and economic assistance,<sup>31</sup> and tried to outline the measures that might be adopted by these organizations in times of political unrest in the Central Asian nations by means of such multilateral frameworks as CIS and CST, so as to pre-

<sup>27</sup> See: V. Paramonov, A. Stokov, “Structural Interdependence of Russia and Central Asia in the Oil and Gas Sectors,” *Conflict Studies Research Centre Central Asia Series 07/ 16E*, Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, June 2007, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> The Treaty on the Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community was signed by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in 2000. The declaration made on 28 February, 2003 rendered such a wish: the organization wish to use energy resources rationally and create a common fuel and resources complex with the joint efforts of its member states on the basis of improving the operational effectiveness of the energy resources systems in all nations, promoting the development of the facilities for the transportation of energy resources between its member states and creating good conditions to improve the export of energy resources to the international energy resources market.

<sup>29</sup> The prototype of this organization was a customs union founded by Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in January 1994 and joined in by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan afterwards. As a regional forum, this organization made some progress in its initial years in terms of the reduction of the tariffs between its members and the elimination of trade barriers. In June 1998, it was renamed as CAEC. When its member states put more and more topics for discussion in the organization, its validity went down gradually. When Karimov (President of Uzbekistan) insisted, the organization was renamed again as CACO in 2001.

<sup>30</sup> See: V. Naumkin, op. cit., pp. 135-136.

<sup>31</sup> See: Liu Fenghua: “Russia in the Central Asia: Evolution of Policies,” *International Politics Quarterly*, No. 2, 2007, pp. 161-166.

vent and handle the contingencies to maintain the Russian interest in this area and the stability of the Central Asian area.<sup>32</sup>

In a word, next to Central Asia with numerous historical links to them, Russia has many important interests in this area, which is an important reason for Russia not to leave any other external forces remolding Central Asia and the surrounding geopolitical environment in their desires. Even China, which is regarded as a “Strategic Partner” by Russia, is guarded by Russia against any spreading of its influence in Central Asia. The U.S. is powerful, yet its pursuit of such strategic goals as security, democracy and energy resources does not align with the Russian strategic consideration. Especially in the fields of democracy and energy resources, their considerations tend to be completely different. The conflict between Russia, which regards Central Asia as its strategic backyard, and the U.S., which has spread its influence there ever since 2001, is decided by the geopolitics and geographical interest reality of the Central Asian area.

According to the former U.S. ambassador to Turkmenistan, Mr. Michael Cotter, when discussing the Central Asian issues with the author, the Bush administration appeared to believe it was creating the idea of democratization, not only in Central Asia, but elsewhere. Assuming that because the U.S. won the Cold War, not only the U.S.’s economic model but also its political model would be rapidly adopted elsewhere in the world. This extraordinarily single-minded view of the world by the administration is the cause of many of the policy setbacks the U.S. has suffered over the past years. In reality, the U.S. claim that the “rose” “tulip” and the other revolution in the Central Asian region meant a significant change in politics was just a wishful thinking. All these so-called Color Revolutions have fallen far short of presaging any real change in the political structure of those countries.

### ***Afghanistan’s Fragile Geopolitical Status***

After the Afghanistan Taliban Regime was overthrown, Afghanistan began to play an important role in the U.S.’s Central Asian policy. According to the Americans concerned, the overthrow of the Taliban Regime opened a “Window of Opportunities” for Afghanistan. Located on the border of Central Asia and South Asia, it gives endless possibility for the U.S. Government to remold the geopolitical environment centering on Afghanistan. However, Afghanistan’s fragile geopolitical status is a tough problem for the U.S. Government to remold the geopolitical environments of Central Asia and surrounding areas.

**Afghanistan’s fragility on security situation:** Among the five Central Asian nations, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are next to Afghanistan, and there are numerous homologous nationalities from these nations in Afghanistan (about 6.2 million Tajik people and 1.5 million Uzbek people in North of Afghanistan); Kyrgyzstan and the Republic of Kazakhstan, especially the former, have been an important cross-boundary route for Afghanistan’s drug traffic all along, and Islamism has gone through a quick revival ever since the independence of the Central Asian nations, so the stability of Afghanistan and the existence of the Islamic extremists in Afghanistan had remained a keen concern to the Central Asian nations. During the civil war, the Central Asian nations supported the Northern Alliance fighting against the Taliban Regime keeping the extremist Islamism ideology from penetrating into the Central Asian area. After the U.S. made a military attack titled Operation Endur-

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<sup>32</sup> See: I. Sarsembaev, “Russia: No Strategic Partnership with China in View,” *China Perspectives*, No. 64, May-June 2006, p. 33.

ing Freedom in Afghanistan in November 2001, the main reason the Central Asian nations to agree to and to provide the U.S. military action with transit flight, night refueling and base leasing was that the allied attack on the Taliban Regime met the Central Asian nations' security interest. To the Central Asian nations, destroying the Taliban Regime and al-Qa'eda and weakening the influence of the Taliban Islamic original clerical ideology helped to improve their own security environments. Cooperating with the U.S. in terms of military action helped to improve their relations with the U.S. guaranteeing more aid from the U.S. and the international organizations led by the U.S., which was the original intention of the Central Asian nations by agreeing to the U.S. military action in Afghanistan. However, the stagnation of the Afghanistan situation and the increasing rampancy of the drug traffic activities passing through the Central Asian nations put them in a more complicated situation instead of improving their external security environments.

Ever since the U.S. took military action in Afghanistan on 7 November, 2001, the U.S. and its NATO allies have destroyed the Taliban Regime but not the Taliban forces. In recent years, there have been numerous terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, which have caused heavy casualties to the U.S. and its allied forces. It is reported that by 22 May, 2007, 579 people died and 5,885 people were wounded in the military actions and violence by the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> The revival of the Taliban and al-Qa'eda forces has further worsened Afghanistan's security conditions. It is said that Afghanistan is even more endangered than Iraq, as it is already "On the Edge of the Big Muddy."<sup>34</sup> When visiting Afghanistan in 2003, Rumsfeld (the Secretary of Defense at that time) proposed that the allied forces had come to a "Victory" stage. However, on 21 July, 2006, the British Supreme Commander stationed in Afghanistan regarded the situation as "Anarchy."<sup>35</sup> Senior officers from the U.S. Department of State also admitted, "We will meet with very dangerous and bloody enemies in Afghanistan this year."<sup>36</sup> When visiting Kyrgyzstan on 5 June, 2007, Robert Gates (the new U.S. Secretary of Defense) even admitted frankly that the "Taliban is reviving."<sup>37</sup> The worsening of the situation in Afghanistan had demanded more military forces be sent by the U.S. to Afghanistan, but the Iraq warfare was actually what the U.S. cared about most. Therefore, the U.S. and its NATO allies kept reducing the military forces in Afghanistan, which kept worsening the originally fragile security situation. In addition, although the U.S. Government and its allies had made many promises to change the Afghanistan situation, numerous terrorist attacks, the stagnation of the military actions by the allied forces and the great difficulty in reconstructing Afghanistan have not only diminished the confidence of Afghanistan people toward the U.S. and Karzai but also re-aroused a great worry from the Central Asian and South Asian nations about the spreading of the severe situation from Afghanistan to their own countries.

**The far-reaching Afghanistan drug traffic problem:** Maybe what is more closely linked with the security situation of the surrounding nations is the Afghanistan drug production problem. Afghanistan's drugs have kept entering into the international drug market mainly via the Central Asian nations all along. They are more susceptible to the influence of the Afghanistan drug production and traffic than the South Asian nations are. The drugs passing through Central Asian nations come from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran, although mostly from Afghanistan. According to the UNODC statistics, over 21% of the morphia and heroin made in Afghanistan enter the international drug market via

<sup>33</sup> Casualty data as of 22 May, 2007, available at [<http://www.icasualties.org/oef/>].

<sup>34</sup> See: Th.H. Johnson, "On the Edge of the Big Muddy: The Taliban Resurgence in Afghanistan," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, May 2007, pp. 93-129.

<sup>35</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>36</sup> Senior State Department Official: "South and Central Asia Regional Update," Foreign Press Center Background Briefing Washington, D.C., 22 March, 2007.

<sup>37</sup> See the speech by Gates on the Bishkek Press Conference when visiting the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, available at [<http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=3979>].

the Central Asian nations. With the great antidrug efforts from the frontier guards in the Central Asian nations, the Afghanistan drug traffic via the Central Asian nations began to drop in numbers in 2006<sup>38</sup> but things are still looking blue. As long as the drug prices in the international market remain so high and the security and economic conditions of Afghanistan are not improved, Afghanistan's drug production will remain hot, so that the Central Asian nations will remain a transfer point for the Afghanistan drug.

As a matter of fact, due to the increase of Afghanistan drug production and the remaining rampant of drug traffic, the security situation of the Central Asian nations is more fragile than it was before 2001. According to a deep study by Svante E. Cornell and Niklas L.P. Swanström, the Afghanistan drug traffic activities passing through the Central Asian nations are not sheer economic activities but combined with organized criminal forces, Islamic extremists, money laundering and terrorist forces. Drug trading has influenced the military, political, social and ecological securities in the Central Asian nations presenting a great challenge against them.<sup>39</sup> According to the above two researchers, drug trading influences the Central Asian nations' security situations in the following three ways: The high profit from drug trading provides the extremist and terrorist forces with great financial support; drug trading has penetrated into all walks of life in the Central Asian nations, and even many high officers in the Central Asian nations have joined in the drug trafficking, resulting in the criminalization in the Central Asian nations. At last, the overwhelming drug traffic will lead to a sharp increase in the number of the drug addicts in the Central Asian nations<sup>40</sup>. Infectious diseases such as AIDS will spread quickly in the Central Asian nations and crimes related to drug trafficking will become serious only to quickly worsen the public health and security situation of the Central Asian nations.<sup>41</sup> In view of the limited financial resources and national security capacity of the Central Asian nations, the challenges caused by the Afghanistan drug traffic problem will hardly be improved within a short time. Therefore, Afghanistan is still regarded by these nations as an actual source of external threats.

**The innate fragility of the Afghanistan status:** As is known to all, Afghanistan is located in the Asian inland. Its closed geographical environment has endowed it with important geopolitical status, but equally important is that Afghanistan has to depend on the routes in other countries for foreign trade. Under such circumstances, the conditions of its neighboring trading infrastructure, the political relations between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries and the latter's administrative systems can limit its foreign trade in many ways.<sup>42</sup> In addition, as a nation with complicated topography and limited resources, Afghanistan has a lack of both money to promote its domestic infrastructure construction and energy resources to meet its domestic market demands. Then Afghanistan has to rely on external investments to promote its national economic development and import energy resources from surrounding countries to keep the running of its economic life. However, any external force involved must have its own interest. Afghanistan depends on its neighboring countries rather than the latter on it, which must lead to the fragility of Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, Afghanistan's lasting political unrest has forced its neighboring countries to close some borders concerned for fear that this unrest might overwhelm their own countries. Although these countries wish for a better situation in Afghanistan,

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<sup>38</sup> 2005 The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *2006 World Drug Report*, Vol. 1, June 2006.

<sup>39</sup> See: S.E. Cornell, N.L.P. Swanström, "The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security," *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 53, No. 4, July-August 2006, pp. 10-18.

<sup>40</sup> According to the UNODC statistics, by 2002, drug addicts in Central Asian nations had amounted to 0.365-0.432 million people. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *Drugs Situation in the Regions Neighboring Afghanistan and the Response of the ODCC*, October 2002, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> See: S.E. Cornell, N.L.P. Swanström, op. cit., p.20.

<sup>42</sup> See: A.L. Boyer, "Recreating the Silk Road; The Challenges of Overcoming Transaction Costs," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 4, November 2006, pp. 74-87.

<sup>43</sup> See: E. Rumer, op. cit., p. 147.

their doubts about the prospect of Afghanistan has made it impossible for them to fully open the borders to Afghanistan immediately. Without an active participation by the surrounding countries, Afghanistan's potential for the "Status as A Hub" will not be fulfilled.

The World Bank used to issue a report, which made a detailed analysis of the current trade relations between Afghanistan and its surrounding countries and expressed its doubt about the role as a hub by Afghanistan in the great trade zone covering Central and South Asia. According to this report, even if the numerous obstacles to the trade between Afghanistan and its neighboring countries are removed, under the poor infrastructure and the stagnating security situation Afghanistan will still be too weak to become a transport corridor in this area. It will remain "the weakest part" of the regional integration under discussion instead, no matter how many benefits its surrounding countries can get in the potential regional integration.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> See: M.G. Weinbaum, "Afghanistan and Its Neighbors: An Ever Dangerous Neighborhood," *Special Report 162*, United States Institute of Peace, Washington D.C., June 2006, p. 8.