

FROM CENTRAL ASIA TO GREAT CENTRAL ASIA: THE GOALS AND ADJUSTMENTS OF U.S. CENTRAL ASIAN STRATEGY

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Introduction

To penetrate and maintain peaceful development of the Central Asian region is a consistent goal of the United States for its international interests. With the 9/11 event as the baseline, since 2001 America's awareness of the strategic importance of Central Asia and the latter's weight in U.S. global strategy has been greatly changed. According to Charles Manes, the 9/11 terrorist attack enabled the U.S. to "discover Central Asia."¹ As a result of this discovery the United States effectively gained a foothold in Central Asia. However, the U.S. has been so impatient that it made a policy mistake. In supporting the Color Revolution in

order to change the political system in Central Asian countries, it promoted democratization in the region in too great a rush.

Facts have proved that the Color Revolution model is not suitable for this area. The U.S. interference in Central Asia has caused some suspicion in Central Asian countries which in turn has affected relations between the United States and Central Asian countries. Due to their suspicion of aggressive U.S. actions in this region, Central Asian countries have reported a steady development in their cooperation with Russia and China. The operation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has been very impressive and successful. It set a strong force to challenge the U.S. strategy in the region; for instance, on 5 July,

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

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2005, the SCO issued a declaration calling for the United States, though not explicitly, to set a timeline for withdrawing its military forces from Karshi-Khanabad Air Base, located in southern Uzbekistan.²

In terms of strategy, the U.S. is very far away from Central Asia. However, judging from the ongoing antiterrorist activities in Afghanistan and given the U.S. military bases in Central Asia, the five Central Asian nations have actually fallen into the U.S. "New Frontier" category.³ This is the first time the U.S. has observed and influenced the Central Asian situation so directly. 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 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 has remained a headache to the U.S.⁴ The

² See: L. Beehner, "The Rise of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *CFR*, 26 June, 2006, from IISS home page, available at [<http://www.iiss.org/whats-new/iiss-in-the-press/press-coverage-2006/june-2006/rise-of-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization/>].

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

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 its independence, which forced the U.S. army to withdraw from the Karshi-Khanabad Airport on 21 November, 2005. The withdrawal of the U.S. army from Uzbekistan symbolized a great setback of its Central Asian Policy, and is regarded as a "Strategic Surprise" for the U.S. in Central Asia.⁵

In order to retard declining U.S. influence 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 background of the above-mentioned adjustment by means of a comprehensive analysis of the internal controversy on the priority of U.S. Central Asian strategic goals after the Andijan Event. As such great controversy results from the above-mentioned strategic challenges against the U.S. in Central Asia, and because this controversy requires serious scholastic thinking on the part of the U.S. concerning its Central Asian strategy, it is necessary to combine a deep study of this controversy with a study of the Great Central Asia strategy (an extended Central Asian strategy) and its significant strategic points.

⁵ 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 Controversy on the Priority of the U.S. Strategic Goals

The question of the Central Asian strategy remains a domestic controversy in the U.S. This controversy came into existence as early as the time before the 9/11 attack happening in 2001. However, both the policy makers and scholars at that time regarded Central Asia to be on the periphery of the U.S.'s global strategy, and the question of Central Asian strategy was not a wide public concern in political or academic circles, so that the controversy on it was limited to relatively bloodless professional debates. But after the Andijan Event, the fact that the U.S. suffered a strategic loss in Central Asia led to a serious domestic controversy on U.S. Central Asian strategy and drove policy makers

and scholars to seriously reflect on almost all strategic problems in U.S. Central Asian strategy. It becomes clearer and clearer that the domestic consensus on Central Asian strategy existing when the 9/11 attack first happened is gone, and that this consensus will be followed by a lasting domestic debate on the controversy of the U.S.'s Central Asian strategy.

Although there is no consensus on the status of the Central Asia Area in the U.S.'s global strategy, there is, however, a consensus, rarely achieved in the past, on the strategic goal of U.S. Central Asian strategy. According to most Americans concerned, the U.S.'s Central Asian strategic goals include security, democracy and energy resources. In the *National Security Report* in 2006, the Central Asia Area was regarded as a region "enjoying lasting priority in our foreign policy." According to this report, there are three reasons for the predominant status of Central Asia in U.S. national security strategy: "In the region (Central Asia) as a whole, the elements of our larger strategy meet, and we must pursue those elements simultaneously: promoting effective democracies and the expansion of free-market reforms, diversifying global sources of energy, and enhancing security and winning the War on Terror."⁶ Similarly, according to Matthew Crosston, the U.S. interest in the Central Asia Area falls into three categories: to prevent terrorism from spreading, to provide implements for political and economic reforms in the Central Asian nations, and to promote the rule of law and to ensure the exploitation of energy resources.⁷ Ariel Cohen (An expert from The Heritage Foundation studying on the Central Asia and the Caspian Sea areas) has even pointed out concisely that the U.S. interest in Central Asia can be concluded with three words: security, energy resources and democracy.⁸

In Svante E. Cornell's opinion, the U.S.'s current Central Asian policy is concerned about three objectives:

- 1) "Hard" security. As the U.S. has launched a global "long-term" war of antiterrorism ever since 2001, the strategic accesses to Central Asia and the Caspian Region have become the primary strategic consideration for the U.S.
- 2) Ever since the cold war was over, U.S. has begun to aim at the diversification of the export of the energy resources from the Caspian Sea, which has been more and more strategically significant with the constant increase of global petroleum and natural gas prices.
- 3) The western camp led by the U.S. won the battle without a real fight in the cold war. The West's victory was interpreted by the U.S. and other western countries as a success of their own democratic strategies, so that this experience propelled the emergence in western international relations theory circles of the "Democratic Peace Theory,"⁹ both before and after the Cold War. The "Democratic Peace Theory" was cherished by western policy makers as the gold standard in handling foreign affairs. Under such circumstances, democracy was increasingly regarded as a powerful weapon to eliminate the roots of terrorism—social disorder, economic recession and governmental repression.¹⁰ In brief, security, democracy and

⁶ *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, White House, Washington, D.C., March 2006, p. 40.

⁷ See: M. Crosston, *Fostering Fundamentalism: Terrorism, Democracy and American Engagement in Central Asia*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, England, 2006, p. 15.

⁸ See: A. Cohen, "U.S. Interests and Central Asia Energy Security," *Backgrounder*, No. 1984, 15 November, 2006, p. 1.

⁹ The main point of this theory is: Compared with totalitarian countries, democratic countries have less tendency to war, at least between them. Although seriously flawed, this logic was later used by western countries' decision makers as an important evidence for the argumentation of their democratic strategies, which was especially true during the Clinton Administration and the Bush Administration (see: M.W. Doyle, "Liberalism and World Politics," *American Political Science Review*, December 1986; C.R. Ember, M. Ember, B. Russett, "Peace Between Participatory Polities," *World Politics*, July 1992; *Debating the Democratic Peace*, ed. by M.E. Brown, S.M. Lynn-Jones, St.E. Miller, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1996).

¹⁰ See: S.E. Cornell: "Eurasia Crisis and Opportunity," *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, No. 11, Fall 2006, p. 30.

energy resources form the strategic goals in the U.S.'s Central Asian strategy and jointly decide the important status of Central Asia in U.S. global strategy.

Although maintaining security, promoting democracy and obtaining energy resources remain the three lasting goals in the U.S. government's Central Asian strategy, it is worthwhile to note that security, democracy and demand for energy resources may have different concerns and devotions from the government agents. Therefore, how to allocate limited resources rationally to the three domains to best promote U.S. interests remains a problem in the U.S.'s Central Asian strategy. Someone used to point out: "fundamental tradeoffs remain in the U.S. policy goals, which include near-term access to military bases in the region, long-term political and economic liberalization, regional stability, access to energy resources, and reducing the flow of narcotics to the world market."¹¹ However, pursuing all these policy goals at the same time undoubtedly remains a great test to U.S. devotion and political will. Other problems are: "pursuit of possession goals may undermine the effort to construct a benign regional environment in the longer term. Conversely, the effort to foster a stable, peaceful, open and democratic regional order may require the sacrifice of concrete short-term objectives."¹² In the past ten-odd years, the U.S. government's Central Asian strategy has oscillated between achieving long-term goals and pursuing short-term interest. The oscillation between the three strategic goals (security, democracy and energy resources) and the unilateral concern of and devotion to any of them have formed an "Inharmonious Trio" concerning the U.S. government's Central Asian strategy. However, among this "Inharmonious Trio", what puzzles policy makers and scholars the most is the priority between democracy and security, which has caused many hot oral and written debates.

Three Arguments: "Boosting", "Democracy", and "Security First"

Giving priority to the promotion of democracy in Central Asia or to the maintenance of regional security and the enhancement of antiterrorism cooperation has remained an unsolved problem concerning the U.S. government's Central Asian strategy: "The United States thus faces two contradictory imperatives: on the one hand, the fight against terror tempts Washington to put aside its democratic scruples and seek closer ties with autocracies throughout the Middle East and Asia. On the other hand, U.S. officials and policy experts have increasingly come to believe that it is precisely the lack of democracy in many of these countries that helps breed Islamic extremism."¹³ In brief, can you spread democracy while fighting terrorism? Can these two goals be compatible?¹⁴

To the first question, most people will say "Yes." However, in answering the second question, there are many different opinions. Some people strongly propose that the government should focus its Central Asian policy on democracy, which is called the "Perspective of Democracy First." Others suggest cooperating with the Central Asian nations to wage a war against terrorism should be the current priority of U.S. strategic goals in Central Asia, which is called the "Perspective of Security First". And still others suggest juggling and promoting both at the same time, which is called the "Perspective of Balanced Boosting." It is worthwhile to note that the "Perspective of Balanced Boosting" is a mere speech strategy and diplomatic attitude, which will be inclined toward democracy or security

¹¹ S. Mahnovski, *et al.*, *Economic Dimensions of Security in Central Asia*, RAND Corp., Santa Monica, 2006, p. 73.

¹² S.N. Macfarlane, "The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia," *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 3, p. 450.

¹³ N. Abbas, "Bolstering Security and Bolstering Democracy in South and Central Asia", *UNISCI Discussion Papers*, No. 10, 1 January, 2006, p. 334.

¹⁴ See: M. Crosston, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

once put into actual policy. Therefore, the “Perspective of Balanced Boosting” is only a means of analysis with little practical significance for strategic constitution or implementation.

Neither the “Perspective of Democracy First” nor the “Perspective of Security First” or the “Perspective of Balanced Boosting” denies the importance of both democracy and security in Central Asian strategy and the necessity for the U.S. to pursue both in Central Asia. Cherishing democracy and worrying about the lack of democracy in Central Asian nations is common wisdom for political and academic circles. As indicated by Negroponte (the first Director of National Intelligence, a position created as a result of the 9/11 commission which criticized the lack of coordination among all U.S. intelligence agencies, especially the various military intelligence services and the CIA) oppression, corruption in leadership and love of wars is a staple of the regimes of the Central Asian nations, which provides fertile soil for the emergence of radical Islamic passions and movements and makes the stability of the Central Asian nations as the suppliers of energy resources and the reliability of them as antiterrorism partners doubtful.

What is worst is that this is not a specious prospect. One or more of these countries would disappear. As a result the door will be thrown wide open to crimes and the spread of terrorism, when these nations will be pushed to the edge of loosing nations.¹⁵ Just because of the possibility of this prospect, the U.S. government increased its concern and devotion to the Central Asia Area after the 9/11 attack. On the one hand, the U.S. cooperated closely with the Central Asian nations against terrorism in order to facilitate the elimination by the U.S. and its allies of the arch-criminal behind the 9/11 attack. On the other hand, the U.S. government boosted democracy in Central Asia by means of governmental aids and by encouraging the development of nongovernmental organizations, so as to bring Central Asia into the West-Atlantic Value System. None of the three perspectives above object to these U.S. government actions. However, there are controversies between the three opinions concerning the U.S.’s current main tasks in Central Asia and the main means to be adopted for these tasks.

“Perspective of Balanced Boosting”

The authorities undoubtedly support the “Perspective of Balanced Boosting,” for instance, former Secretary of State Colin Powell indicated that liberty, prosperity and peace are indivisible principles (or policy goals) that can be superimposed on each other. Therefore, a policy focused on only one of them will inevitably seek all the three goals at the same time.¹⁶ The former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice points out that the attempt to draw a pure and clear line between U.S. security interest and democratic goals cannot show the reality of the world today at all. Supporting the growth of the democratic systems in all countries is not against an illusion as a moral war but would be confronted with the actual response and challenges.¹⁷ To cater to the complicated U.S. situation in the Central Asia Area and to maintain U.S. strategic interests there, the U.S. government wishes to boost the democratic cause in the Central Asian Area, in order to eliminate the soil for Islamic extremism, while cooperating closely with the Central Asian nations on military action against terrorism. Also, the policy makers firmly believe that these two causes can support each other and work well in combination. It is the current policy of high-level U.S. officials that the U.S. won’t develop a singular policy focused on sheer security considerations or economic interests with any Central Asian nation. On the contrary, the U.S. is devoted to

¹⁵ See: J. Nichol, *Central Asia: Regional Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests*, CRS Report Order Code RL33458, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Updated 26 April, 2007, p. 23.

¹⁶ See: The United State Mission to the European Union, “Assistant Secretary of State Jones on U.S. Policy in Central Asia”, 12 January, 2004, available at [<http://www.useu.be/Terrorism/USResponse/Dec1401JonesUSPolicyCentralAsia.html>].

¹⁷ See: C. Rice, “The Promise of Democratic Peace,” *Washington Post*, 11 December, 2005, p. B7.

boosting its strategic goals (politics, democracy and energy resources) in a balanced way,¹⁸ so as to implement a multidimensional approach covering security, democracy and economics.¹⁹ The opinion of James MacDougall (Assistant Secretary of Defense) is representative, “You cannot allow your security interests to prevent the agenda of political development, and you cannot prevent your agenda of political development from stopping your interests in the security and energy fields. These have to go hand in hand.”²⁰ Thus it can be seen that domestic mainstream opinion proposes that pursuing democracy and achieving security are both important tasks for the U.S. in Central Asian affairs, and that these two criteria are important standards to appraise the performance of the U.S. government’s Central Asian policy.

“Perspective of Democracy First”

The “Perspective of Democracy First” agrees to some extent on the official insistence that antiterrorism and democracy are not two contradictory goals, but what they criticize is the oral and behavioral nonconformity of the government’s Central Asian policy: orally singing high praise for democracy but sacrificing democracy at the expense of security during the actual implementation of policy. As someone pointed out, “The deals on the stability and democracy of these inland countries in Central Asia clearly show the difference between what the American say and what they do.” Especially ever since the Tulip Revolution occurred in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and since the “Andijan Event” occurred in May 2005, the U.S. government has increasingly shifted the focus of its Central Asian policy from promoting further democratic reforms in the Central Asian nations to achieving stability of the Central Asia Area. The goal is to attract the Central Asian nations to support the U.S.’s proposed “West-oriented” and “South-oriented” Energy Resources Corridors and to prevent Islamic extremism from overthrowing the conventional Central Asia regimes.²¹ The “Perspective of Democracy First” proposes that the U.S. government’s stress on such security problems as antiterrorism will lead to a misunderstanding among the state leaders in the Central Asian nations that the U.S. government’s moderate tone on promoting their political and economic reforms is a reward for the support from Central Asian nations on the U.S. war of antiterrorism, so that their state leaders will regard boosting U.S. democracy and human rights causes in Central Asia as a long-term issue and will keep on with their own authoritarian regimes while the U.S. stresses antiterrorism.²²

The typical representative of the “Perspective of Democracy First” is Mathew Crosston of Clemson University. He agrees with the strategic goals the U.S. set in Central Asia for itself and regards promoting democracy, pursuing security and obtaining energy resources in this area as a most far-sighted action. He even agrees with the U.S. government about combining its antiterrorism cooperation with its Central Asian allies with the promotion of Central Asian domestic democratic development as the U.S.’s current philosophical foundation of its Central Asian policy. He agrees that the U.S. should learn from

¹⁸ See: R.A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priority,” Part II, Testimony to Committee on International Relations House of Representatives, Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, 26 April, 2006, in: *109th Congress Second Session, Serial No. 109-186*, p. 9.

¹⁹ See: E.A. Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, “Kazakhstan and the United States in a Changed World,” *Remarks to the Institute of World Economy and Policy*, Almaty, Kazakhstan, 23 August, 2006.

²⁰ Quoted from: G. Saidazimova, “Central Asia: Could Regional Dynamics Spell Closer U.S.-Kazakh Ties?” *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty Features*, 8 June, 2006.

²¹ See: P. Ipek, “Challenges for Democracy in Central Asia: What Can United States Do?” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 39, No. 1, Spring 2007, p. 102.

²² See: Ibidem; R. Giragosian, “The Strategic Central Asian Arena,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 146-147; V. Naumkin, “Uzbekistan’s State-Building Fatigue,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 138-139; F. Hill, K. Jones, “Fear of Democracy or Revolution: The Reaction to Andijon,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 132-133.

Afghanistan, which suffered from extremist and terrorist movements due to tyranny in the early 1990s. However, what Crosston unfortunately criticizes is the great divergence between the speech and the behavior of the United States. In his view, the U.S. says “Yes” to antiterrorism and the obtaining of energy resources but “No” to promoting the emergence of the democratic systems in Central Asia. In his opinion, stability, liberty, openness, property rights, dignity and justice are the most effective means to eliminate the threats of terrorism, and that a society must be deeply imbued with these democratic values in order to ultimately withstand terrorist attacks. Crosston believes that without maintaining these democratic values, a country will be a subject to attacks now and forever. And the U.S.’s single-minded pursuit of its security interest regardless of democracy in the Central Asian nations is taken by Crosston as a “Fatal Political Crime.” He strictly warns policy makers that insisting on such a security-oriented policy will lead to a more dangerous result than “the mess of democracy” and “Stability under totalitarianism,” namely violent Islamic radicalism, which has cultural, lingual and religious links with the majority of the Central Asian populations and airtight political foundations in terms of both logic and analytics, but is a chilling and irreparable threat to the U.S.!²³ Crosston’s opinions are somewhat radical and his words carry a strong ideological style, but his viewpoint, which is typical of the “Perspective of Democracy First,” can’t be ignored. These opinions will be of great significance in United States society and will furthermore greatly influence the U.S. government’s Central Asian policy.

“Perspective of Security First”

Those advocating the “Perspective of Security First” do not agree with the “Perspective of Democracy First.” The former recognize the important roles of democratic reforms on the stability of the Central Asia Area and U.S. interests in this area, but the proponents do not think it is necessary for the U.S. to currently focus its main resources and efforts on the promotion of democracy in the Central Asian nations. On the contrary, according to the “Perspective of Security First,” the U.S. should tone down its rhetoric about democracy or do more to understand the complicated situations in the Central Asian nations and cooperate with them against terrorism for the sake of U.S. national interest and long-term strategic goals. However, it is worthwhile to note that those proposing the “Perspective of Security First” claim to have many validating arguments supporting their view against the “Perspective of Democracy First,” and they claim that their opinion can be verified from several different points of view. Two points of view are especially influential. Based on the complexity of the situation in Central Asia, one point of view proposes that in the Central Asia Area where the interests of great nations intersect, the U.S. must consider many objective limitations when boosting democracy there. Advocacy of democracy in the region can be resisted by many large nations or damage the stability of this area. Another point of view focuses on the problems during the transition of the Central Asian nations, proposing that the U.S. should consider these nations’ actual concerns and national conditions when boosting democracy there, a point of view which considers with respect national aspirations. All points of view come to the same logical conclusion, that is, since the U.S. cannot promote democracy smoothly in Central Asia under so many limitations, the U.S. government should first pay attention to regional security and cooperation on antiterrorism. After all, resistance against the maintenance of regional security and the cooperation on antiterrorism will be much less than that against the promotion of democracy in this area.

From the regional angle, the “Perspective of Security First” proposes that the geopolitical status of Central Asia has led to the gathering of the interests of great nations, which makes the situation of this area rather complicated. Under such circumstances, the U.S. must be careful when promoting democracy in Central Asia. Large nations might achieve limited coordination on some important issues in this

²³ See: M. Crosston, op. cit., pp. 18, 19, 12, 11.

area, still the fact that the interests of large nations are too complicated to be automatically harmonized determines that even actions by the great nations thought to be restricted and of limited effect are subject to unexpected effects. Therefore, the great nations' concern about and struggle for the influence and energy resources in Central Asia might lead to (or have led to) the "New Great Game."²⁴ To prevent the "New Great Game" from coming true, the U.S. government should avoid boosting democracy radically in Central Asia for fear of great resistance from China and Russia, which might interpret that as an act of daring.

In addition—the "Perspective of Security First" proposes that the U.S.'s radical promotion of democracy in this area might lead to a firm determination of the state leaders of the Central Asian nations to go on with their extremism and cooperate with Russia and China against the U.S. efforts on democracy and indirectly weaken the powers of the parties and nongovernmental organizations in the Central Asian nations supporting western democracy.²⁵ For the long run, this action will damage the overall U.S. interests in this area and be worthless for the development of democracy here.²⁶ It is said that the "Andijan Event" added the last point for that. It is also said that the great distance between the U.S. and Central Asia is an obstacle for the U.S. to influence the orientation of the development of the political situations in Central Asia as the countries neighboring Central Asia (Russia and China) do by such powerful means of policy. Therefore, "the policy of promoting democracy and human rights in the region will continue to prove ineffectual and indeed counterproductive."²⁷ It is even said that as Central Asia is much less important than the Middle East, the U.S. should give up its "Crusade" to Central Asia to avoid taking the rash promotion of democracy as its overall strategic goals for fear of the unexpected negative results.²⁸

From the angle of the specific national conditions of Central Asian nations, the "Perspective of Security First" proposes that the U.S. must not promote democracy radically, which has caused numerous problems during the transition of the Central Asian nations. Especially since the happening of the Tulip Revolution and of the Andijan Event in 2005—there has been a better domestic awareness of the complicated situation in Central Asia, which is somewhat of a victory for the "Perspective of Security First." After the Tulip Revolution and the "Andijan Event," Martha B. Alcott (senior researcher on Russia and the Eurasia Project in the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace) warned policy makers while giving evidence to the U.S. Congress, "In today's Central Asia, it would still be a mistake to romanticize the prospect of a 'color' revolution. A peaceful (or non-peaceful) popularly supported effort at regime change in the region would not necessarily produce a democratic outcome. A year after the virtually bloodless ouster of Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akaev, the country appears more fragmented and potentially unstable than before."²⁹ S. Frederick Starr also pointed out, "There is no fast track to democracy in Central Asia; democracy cannot be built in the absence of other key reforms, especially at the local level, and those can only come from working patiently with other governments, however frustrating this may be at times."³⁰

²⁴ M.E. Ahrari, J. Beal, "The New Great Game in Muslim Central Asia," *McNair Paper 47*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, Washington, DC, U.S., January 1996; A.M. Jaffe, R. Manning, "The Myth of the Caspian 'Great Game': The Real Geopolitics of Energy," *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 4, Winter 1998-1999, pp. 112-131; A. Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2000; *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.

²⁵ See: V. Socor, "Cheney Visit Spotlights Kazakhstan's Pivotal Role," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 8 May, 2006.

²⁶ See: S.E. Cornell, op. cit.

²⁷ M. Mihalka, "Not Much of a Game: Security Dynamics in Central Asia," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2007, p. 38.

²⁸ See: R. Weitz, "Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, p. 161.

²⁹ M.B. Olcott, "U.S. Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priority," Part II, in: *109th Congress Second Session, Serial No. 109-186*, p. 33.

³⁰ S.F. Starr, "A Partnership for Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 4, July/August 2005, p. 169.

As a matter of fact, while stressing that the U.S. should promote democracy and human rights moderately, the “Perspective of Security First” proposes that the current main task in Central Asia is cooperation against terrorism in order to maintain U.S. security interests.³¹ After the “Andijan Event,” someone suggested that “No matter whether or not we are willing to,” the U.S. must continue its contact and communication with the governments and government offices in these nations (including Uzbekistan), for there were no better alternatives currently. Under such circumstances, in order to maintain its own security interests, including its cooperation with the Central Asian nations for the stability of Afghanistan, the U.S. should stop its punishment of Uzbekistan, should stop blackmailing Uzbekistan to respect democracy and human rights by means of aid, and should more multilaterally cooperate and coordinate with Uzbekistan within the NATO’s Partnership for Peace Program (PfP). If the U.S. government still goes its own way to stress democracy, its course of action “at best denies the U.S. policy community access to some of the most important institutions in Uzbekistan’s power structure and at worst limits the opportunity for U.S. policymakers to influence their Uzbek counterparts,”³² which can only serve to weaken U.S. security interests.

The Adjustment of the U.S. Government’s Central Asian Policy

From 2001 to 2005, in taking advantage of the opportunities brought about by the 9/11 attack and its great overall national strength, the U.S. military force marched into Central Asia smoothly and grew up within only several years to be an external force not to be trifled with in influencing the development of Central Asia. It is worth noting that U.S. policy toward Central Asia is claimed to be focused in a very fundamental way on supporting the full sovereignty of the five Central Asian states. Nevertheless, although the U.S. seems to have gained domination in the competition on the Central Asian affairs with Russia and China, this assessment neglects negative effects flowing from the U.S. presence in the Central Asia Area. These negative effects were caused by the aggressiveness of the U.S.’s Central Asian policy as determined by the Bush Government as part of its distinct global strategy. For instance, the surprising events in Central Asia in 2005—mainly the Kyrgyzstan Tulip Revolution and the Uzbekistan Andijan Event—showed that the increase in the influence of the U.S., which was a powerful external body taking an active part in Central Asian affairs, had aroused the worry and vigilance of those in power in the Central Asian nations, and in addition concerned other countries outside the region, such as Russia.

Because of the setback of U.S. influence in the Central Asia Area after the “Andijan Event,” the U.S. government has begun to adjust its Central Asian policy since the second half of 2005. The “Corridor of Reform” concept raised by Condoleezza Rice and her proposal on the integration of Central Asia and South Asia during her visits to the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in October 2005 are widely accepted as a symbol of the adjustment of the U.S.’s Central Asian policy.³³ Up to now, it can be seen that the main orientation of the adjustment of its Central Asian policy is: reconstruct gov-

³¹ See: M. Rywkin, “Security and Stability in Central Asia: Differing Interests and Perspectives,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 207, 2006, p. 198.

³² E. Rumer, “The U.S. Interests and Role in Central Asia after K2,” *Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2006, p. 153.

³³ See: A.L. Boyer, “Recreating the Silk Road; The Challenges of Overcoming Transaction Costs,” *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 2006, p. 73; USID: “A Central-South Asia Energy Corridor,” *Energy Update*, Issue 2, March/April 2007, p. 22.

ernment offices and set up the Department of South Asian and Central Asian Affairs; try to integrate Central Asia and South Asia with a focus on Afghanistan in order to create a “Greater Central Asia;” plan to make a “South-oriented” transport corridor to diversify the export of the Central Asian energy resources; treat different Central Asian nations in a different way in terms of strategy, so as to make the Republic of Kazakhstan a “Reform Corridor” and “Regional Leader;” pay more attention than before to the roles of educational aids and nongovernmental organizations in the promotion of the cause of Central Asian democracy, so as to ease the fear about promoting democracy in Central Asia.

The adjustment of the U.S. government’s Central Asian policy is still in process, so it is not yet time to make an all-around evaluation on the potential consequences of this adjustment. However, in this adjustment, it is very clear that the U.S. government is reversing its own decreased influence on Central Asia by employing much more moderate means than before. Such a change in its Central Asian policy shows that the U.S. government is not pursuing a rapid change of the Central Asian situation by radical means after learning from the lessons in 2005. This has made its Central Asian policy more prudent, more flexible and more targeted than before. But in terms of strategy, there is no change in the content of the U.S.’s Central Asian strategic goals (still energy resources, security and democracy) but a change in the emphasis from the previous promoting democracy to the current maintaining security and obtaining energy resources. However, it is hard to know whether the adjustment in the U.S. government’s Central Asian strategy will have the expected effects for the long run, because there are some mistakes in its Central Asian policy, and neither the Central Asian nations nor related nations agree on the U.S. policy in the Central Asia Area.

Domestic discussions currently in process concerning U.S. Central Asian strategy, ongoing as a response to the setback of the U.S. government’s Central Asian policy, involve a wide range of strategic problems. This paper discusses one dimension of these strategic problems—the controversy on the ordering of U.S. strategic priorities in Central Asia. In fact, the discussions concerning other U.S. strategic problems are also intense. Other controversies include the nature of the U.S. strategic interests in the Central Asia Area, by what means should the U.S. maintain these interests, what is the status of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia in U.S. energy resources strategy, whether security or democracy is the preferred U.S. strategic goal in the Central Asia and whether the Republic of Kazakhstan should have a priority in the partnership in Central Asia. As scholastic discussions on the U.S.’s Central Asian strategy are still in process, it is predictable that there might be a change in the orientation of the discussions on the Central Asian strategy, especially with the increasing intensity of the discussions and the change of the Central Asian situation.

Especially since 2007 and 2008, there have been great changes in the international situation: the severe conflicts between the U.S. and Russia on missile defense systems, democracy, supply of energy resources and the Kosovo issue will further worsen their relationship. More changes: after agreeing on the first complete Central Asian strategy in June 2007, the EU has been entering the Central Asia Area more actively; in addition, the stagnated Afghanistan and Iraqi antiterrorist wars has diluted the U.S.’s strategic efforts in other areas (including Central Asia). Furthermore, in order to create its own diplomatic legacies in the last year of Bush administration, in 2008 (also an election year in the U.S.), the Bush government was focusing on what could more easily lead to resounding effects and outstanding achievements and therefore had no time for Central Asian affairs. Additionally, the success of the SCO Summit in August 2008 further consolidated the organization’s cohesive force. Given such complexity, scholastic discussions on the U.S.’s Central Asian strategy might slow down a bit or even get weakened as the U.S. adjusts its Central Asian policy. However, since these controversies are about some core problems concerning the U.S.’s Central Asian strategy, it can be seen that the relevant discussions will still go on for a period of time. It is hard to know which opinions will win in the scholastic debate on the Central Asian strategy and what influence will this debate have on the current Central Asian strategy, but it is certain that this debate on the U.S.’s Central Asian strategy is indispensable.

Toward a Great Central Asia Strategy

Clearly, U.S. Central Asia strategy did not meet its original goals and objectives, and the controversies on the priority of the U.S. strategic goals in the region have been continuing since the very beginning. Seeing their policy being thwarted repeatedly in Central Asia, U.S. scholars and policy makers have begun to examine themselves. In the summer of 2005, Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies, proposed a Great Central Asia strategy to refine the U.S. Central Asia strategy and its strategic interests in the region.³⁴ What Starr proposed is a Great Central Asia cooperative partnership for development, which will have the U.S. taking the lead, the five Central Asian states and Afghanistan entering as the main members, and India and Pakistan also participating. The main idea of the proposal is to take the U.S.'s control of the situation in Afghanistan as an opportunity to promote optional and flexible cooperation in security, democracy, economy, transport and energy, and, to constitute a new region by combining Central Asia with South Asia. The United States is to play the role of a midwife to promote the rebirth of the entire region.³⁵

Starr's new concept of a Great Central Asia strategy drew the attention of the Bush administration. In October, the State Department reorganized its South Asia Division and included the issues of the five Central Asian states into the jurisdiction of South Asia Division. Between 25 and 26 April, the U.S. held a congressional hearing, focusing on the Great Central Asia strategy. In June, just a few days before the SCO Summit opened, the United States called together Central Asian countries for an international conference entitled "Electricity Beyond Borders" to discuss energy cooperation between Central Asia and South Asia in Istanbul, Turkey. Having come this far, the United States has got a clear strategy to use energy as a breakthrough issue in order to set its Great Central Asia vision into action.

Richard A. Boucher, the U.S. Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs in his remark at the meeting clearly indicated: "We have profound and long-term interests in South and Central Asia that I think are underscored by the number of recent high-level official visits to the region. President Bush's trip to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in March, Vice President Cheney's visit to Kazakhstan in May and Secretary Rice's trip to the region last October highlighted our three primary goals: strengthening democratic stability and economic reforms, fostering regional security and cooperation on the war on narcotics and terrorism, and promoting economic growth and regional cooperation."³⁶

The five Central Asian countries have long been a part of the former Soviet Union. Divided by the long-time war in Afghanistan, Central Asia and South Asia have been isolated from each other in history for a long period of time. The two regions have apparent differences in history, religious belief and culture. The reason why the United States is pursuing the "mandatory matching" policy is that it believes it has got two keys to open the south door of the Central Asia Area. First, it has succeeded in putting the situation of Afghanistan in control. Second, it has been able to continuously expand its influence in South Asia.³⁷

Afghanistan is an important channel connecting Central Asia with South Asia. The Anti-terrorism war has won the United States the full right to speak on the situation in Afghanistan. In their vision of the Great Central Asia strategy, Afghanistan is an important hub. U.S. Secretary of State

³⁴ See: S.F. Starr, op. cit.

³⁵ See: S.F. Starr, "In Defense of Greater Central Asia," 2008, available at [http://www.ifri.org/files/politique_etrangere/StarrVO.pdf].

³⁶ R.A. Boucher, *Remarks at Electricity Beyond Borders: A Central Asia Power Sector Forum*, Istanbul, Turkey, 13 June, 2006, available at [<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/67838.htm>].

³⁷ See: K. Strachota, "New Regional In-Security System in Central Asia," *CES Studies*, 22 February, 2001, available at [<http://osw.waw.pl/en/epub/eppace/01/02.htm>].

Condoleezza Rice said in her testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee: “In Afghanistan, we support the efforts of the new democratic government in Kabul to lead the nation toward freedom and prosperity. To achieve that goal, we have taken a hard look at our overall policy and adopted a true counterinsurgency strategy—a complete approach that integrates military efforts with political support, counter-narcotics programs, development priorities, and regional diplomacy... Our goal is to help the Afghan government improve the quality of life for its people by extending security, providing good governance, and opening up new economic opportunity.”³⁸

In recent years, the United States has attached great importance to its South Asian operation and has been vigorously supporting India as its strategic ally in South Asia. Mr. Richard A. Boucher clearly indicates when speaking about the relationship between the U.S. and India: “The United States and India have become partners who can act together on a global scale, whether it is in the U.N. or peace-keeping issues, or other matters. It is very important to the U.S. and very important to India that we have a strong partnership to move together on a global scale. I am happy to be part of that. I am happy to do my bit of keeping it moving forward and looking for these areas of cooperation.”³⁹

Economic relations between South Asia and Central Asia have grown in recent years. India has an advantage over Pakistan in this case in that its relations with Central Asia were strengthened during the Soviet era, creating the groundwork for further cooperation. Indian companies have gained a strong foothold in many Central Asian countries. Pakistan has set up Joint Economic Commissions with all Central Asian countries with the goal of promoting commerce and cooperation between both parties. Energy supply pipeline projects are naturally a major part of economic relations between these countries. It involves the Indian subcontinent’s quest for supplies from the oil fields of the region. Much of India and Pakistan’s diplomacy in the region has to do with the promise of transnational pipelines, including the Turkmenistan-Pakistan-India and Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline projects. These projects are at the heart of diplomacy between South Asia and other major players such as the United States, and are also dependent on the stability of Afghanistan and a normalization of India-Pakistan relations.⁴⁰

Although both India and Pakistan have had steady bilateral security and economic cooperation with Central Asian countries they lack a comprehensive mechanism for further cooperation. For this reason, they followed the SCO with interest and hoped that they could join the organization as full members as soon as possible.⁴¹ However, the Greater Central Asia strategy by the United States has provided both India and Pakistan an opportunity to participate in the affairs of Central Asia without a full membership of SCO. India has announced that it will join the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline project which is supported by the United States.

Russia and China are adjacent to each other in the Central Asia Area. Both countries have their own state interests in the region. The Central Asian countries have their common needs for economic development, antiterrorism and regional security with China and Russia. Under the framework of the SCO, the mutual cooperation between these countries is enhanced. Accordingly, the influence of China and Russia in Central Asia has become more important, while at the same time the ability of the West (the U.S. and the EU) to influence political developments in the region could be significantly diminished. To change this situation the U.S. has brought up the “choosing from the South” policy in Central Asia and determined to use energy, transportation and infrastructure construction as bait to attract Central Asian countries from the post-Soviet Union dominance. By this means, it can change the external

³⁸ Testimony of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Thursday, 8 February, 2007, available at [<http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2007/RiceTestimony070208.pdf>].

³⁹ R.A. Boucher, *Remarks to the Press New Delhi, India*, 10 November, 2006, available at [<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2006/75895.htm>].

⁴⁰ See: S. Varadarajan, “Energy Key in the New Asian Architecture,” *The Hindu*, 25 January, 2006; A. Tarzi, D. Kim-mage, “Pipelines or Pipe-dreams?,” *RFERL*, 18 February, 2005.

⁴¹ See: Maj. E. Turner, “What is Driving India’s and Pakistan’s Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?” *Strategic Insights*, Vol. IV, Issue 8, August 2005.

strategic focus of Central Asia from the current Russia-and-China-oriented partnership to cooperative relations with South Asian countries. It can break the long-term Russian dominance in the Central Asian Area, it can split and disintegrate the cohesion of the SCO and gradually establish U.S. dominance in Central and South Asia.⁴²

An important part of the Great Central Asia strategy is to export energy from Central Asia to South Asia. However, the total energy reserves and current exploiting capacity in the Central Asian Region is quite limited. A large part of it is under control of Russia. To export energy to South Asia countries will inevitably cause conflict with Russia.⁴³ The reason Kazakhstan is not enthusiastic about this idea is that it does not want to damage its close strategic alliance with Russia. Tajikistan's future water resources basically have been under control of the Russian Aluminum Company and (until recently) the UES of Russia. Regarding the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan Natural Gas Pipeline Project, the biggest problem lies in the gas reserves of Turkmenistan. According to the agreement, Turkmenistan should sell 100 billion cubic meters of natural gas to Russia every year. Starting from 2009, it will also provide 30 billion cubic meters of gas through pipelines to China. Considering Turkmenistan's current gas productivity, it already has difficulties in fulfilling its contracts with these two countries. It could probably hardly produce any more to the South.

Conclusion

Over the last few years, international commentary on Central Asia often turned to the imagery of the Great Game. Previously the Game was primarily a rivalry between the two major colonial powers, namely the British and Russian empires, for control over Central Eurasia.⁴⁴ More recently the Great Game has been expanded to include more players by bringing regional heavyweights China, India, as well as the key outside power the United States, but the Game has retained its main characteristic feature, which is big powers jockeying for position in Central Asia.⁴⁵ The latest conceptualization sees the Game as being largely driven by the desire of Russia and China to squeeze the United States out of Central Asia and establish their exclusive control over the strategically located and energy-rich region.⁴⁶

Magnificent as it appears, the Great Central Asia strategy will still have to face some practical problems in implementation. For historical and cultural reasons, Central Asian and South Asian countries lack a basic sense of identification and an in-depth experience of cooperation. The mutual trust between India and Pakistan is not strong enough for implementing large-scale cross-border infrastructure projects. The Energy reserve issues of Afghanistan and Central Asia are the two blind sides of the Great Central Asia strategy. Apparently, Afghanistan is the most critical pawn in the Great Central Asia strategy. Currently, the U.S. and Afghan central government has very limited control over the situation in Afghanistan. Taliban remnants still remain. The warlord regimes and drug trade are still

⁴² See: I. Torbakov, "The West, Russia and China in Central Asia: What Kind of Game is Being Played in the Region?" *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 2007, pp. 78-91; M.K. Bhadrakumar, "Russia's Great Game in Central Asia," *Asia Times*, 25 August, 2006.

⁴³ See: M.K. Bhadrakumar, "Russia's Great Game in Central Asia."

⁴⁴ See, for example: D. Kimmage, "Central Asia: Is Regional Turbulence Return of the Great Game?" *RFE/RL*, 19 July, 2005; idem, "2005 in Review: The Geopolitical Game in Central Asia," *RFE/RL*, 29 December, 2005.

⁴⁵ See: F. Kempe, "Central Asia Emerges As Strategic Battleground," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May, 2006; N. Schmidle, "In Central Asia, New Players, Same Game," *Washington Post*, 19 January, 2006; N. Sokov, "The Not-So-Great Game in Central Asia," *PONARS Policy Memo*, No. 403, December 2005; St.A. Weiss, "Don't Play This Great Game," *International Herald Tribune*, 9 December, 2005; I. Torbakov, "Central Asia: Replaying the Great Game," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 13 October, 2005.

⁴⁶ See: I. Torbakov, "The West, Russia and China in Central Asia: What Kind of Game is Being Played in the Region?"; A.S. Tyson, "Russia and China Bullying Central Asia, U.S. Says," *Washington Post*, 15 July, 2005; F.W. Engdahl, "Central Asia, Washington, and Beijing Energy Geopolitics," *GlobalResearch.ca*, 19 December, 2005.

major regional security problems. According to the Great Central Asia strategy, most major transport infrastructure and pipelines will pass through Afghanistan. The risks are too high.

Obviously, in geopolitical terms, the United States' Great Central Asia policy aims at crafting the sinews of cooperation in the areas of energy, transportation and infrastructure construction with a view to bringing the region out of the current orbit of Russian-Chinese influence within the SCO framework and to forge cooperative relations between the region and South Asia. Washington calculates that the policy will inevitably break the long-term Russian influence over Central Asia, disintegrate the cohesion of the SCO and, inevitably, catapult the U.S. as the dominant power on the new template of Central Asia and South Asia.

However, in the long run, the United States may strategically misjudge other large countries by "setting up another cooking stove." It may also disrupt the existing cooperative mechanisms and put Central Asian countries into a dilemma of choice. It is suspected that the implementation of the Great Central Asia strategy will have a negative impact on regional security, because it is likely to destroy the integrity of the entire Central Asian Region and break the balance of the roles of big powers on Central Asian countries, hence leading to the emergence of polarization and confrontation within the Central Asian Region.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ See: M.K. Bhadrakumar, "Russia's Great Game in Central Asia"; A.S. Tyson, *op. cit.*; F.W. Engdahl, *op. cit.*