

REGIONAL SECURITY

CENTRAL ASIA
IN SEARCH OF STABILITY

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The tension in the Central Asian Region, particularly in its southern part, which includes Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran, largely affects the rest of this vast area and forces the United States and its allies to seek prompt settlement of the crisis they have on their hands. The situation in occupied Iraq is tense; the Turkish invasion into Iraqi Kurdistan in search of terrorists of the Kurdistan Workers' Party did nothing to relieve the tension; the conflict area spread even further. Two other events (the state of emergency President of Pakistan Musharraf introduced on 3 November, 2007, allegedly as an antiterrorist and anti-extremist measure, and the death of Benazir Bhutto at the hands of terrorists) brought the tension to boiling point.

About twelve months ago, two fairly prominent people—James Jones, NATO commander in 2003-2007, and Mansour Ijaz, who in 2000 initiated a ceasefire between the mujaheddin and the Indian troops in Kashmir—offered their opinions on the continued conflict and possible solutions in *The Financial Times*. “Pakistan and Afghanistan stand at a dangerous crossroads in their complex and troubled relationship. Both strong allies of the U.S. in its war to eradicate terrorism, Afghanistan is laboring to find stability under NATO mandate while Pakistan is struggling to find a balance between national interest and regional responsibilities to fight extremists on its own soil. Sadly, Afghanistan is losing its struggle for stability and security in part because Pakistan cannot decide whether it wants to fight terrorism or encourage it as state policy.”¹

¹ J. Jones, M. Ijaz, “Pakistan Holds the Key to South Asia’s Security,” *The Financial Times*, 21 February, 2007.

This suggests that Pakistan is held responsible for the dangerous situation in Afghanistan. Its leaders tend to encourage and/or ignore the Taliban's armed inroads from Pakistan's border areas into Afghanistan. This has already caused numerous complaints from the United States, NATO, and the Afghan government.

What is behind Pakistan's puzzling behavior? It looks very strange in light of the incessant references to the "fraternal peoples" of both countries and their "centuries-long friendship" that are invariably made at all the multilateral and bilateral meetings involving the two states, both of which are officially described as Islamic. The answer should be sought in the past: practically all of Pakistan's military regimes were tuned to permanent confrontation with India and therefore looked at Afghanistan as its strategic depth, i.e. territory the Pakistani armed forces could have used as a rear base in the event of a war with India.

After 9/11, when the armed units of the Taliban, which had been in power for some time in Afghanistan, were pushed to the Northwestern Frontier Province of Pakistan, the situation in the region changed radically.² In fact, the Pakistani military, which is at all times closely following India's maneuvers, should have been assured by America's and NATO's presence in Afghanistan, where they were fighting terror. The Kashmir issue is another persisting "headache." Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) uses it to keep the Indian troops stationed in the province on tenterhooks. Its agents controlled and supported terrorist groups in the region, paid them in petrodollars coming from the Gulf, and drew "live force" into their operations from among the idling fighters from the Arab countries and the mojaheddin of the "Afghan wars." "For its part, the Pakistani government, at the highest levels, denies any official sanctions for these activities, suggesting that, at most, these reports reflect the activity of former members of its intelligence service acting independently and against government policy."³

The heads of Pakistan's ISI maintained close ties with the Islamist organizations engaged in brainwashing the newly conscripted terrorists through numerous religious schools (madrasahs) supported through the same ISI. Jones and Ijaz wrote in their article: "Pakistan's army and intelligence apparatus have benefited immensely, meanwhile, from the big business of war."⁴

Earlier information about foreign fighters being trained in Taliban camps in the Northwestern Frontier Province was confirmed. The local administration insists that it is for the central government to address the problem of mercenaries: the fighters who rent their dwellings pay in advance. To evict them, the owner has to return money he no longer has. The fighters, in turn, threaten to kill anyone bold enough to turn them out. The Pakistani government, for example, paid four warlords in South Waziristan (the city of Wana) \$530 thousand it received from al-Qa'eda when the agreement of March 2004 was signed. The foreign fighters refused to leave; in the last two years more than 150 local people lost their lives and hundreds had to flee for their lives to North Waziristan.⁵

According to information supplied by the counterterrorist coalition command, a "younger, more aggressive generation of Taliban senior leadership" is pushing Mullah Omar and his circle aside. Siraj Haggani stands apart from the "younger, more aggressive generation" due to his methods of warfare: "Kidnapping, assassinations, beheading women, indiscriminate killings, and suicide bombers—Siraj is the one dictating the new parameters of brutality associated with Taliban senior leadership."⁶

² It should be said here that (1) the Pashtoons live both on the territory of Afghanistan (there are about 9 million of them) and in the north of Pakistan (16 million); (2) the Afghan side refuses to recognize the Durand Line the British colonialists demarcated and made the state border. For this reason, the Pashtoon tribes can easily cross the conventional state border.

³ J. Dobbins, "Ending Afghanistan's Civil War," *Testimony Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate*, 8 March, 2007, p. 5.

⁴ J. Jones, M. Ijaz, op. cit.

⁵ See: M.I. Khan, "Fractious Militants United by One Thing," *BBC News*, North Waziristan, 7 March, 2007.

⁶ "New Generation Taliban Rivaling Chief: US-led Coalition," *Yahoo!News*, 19 October, 2007.

He is extending his operation range using the money he gets from the Middle East; he is also supervising conscriptions of volunteers in Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Chechnia, and Turkey.

This is amply illustrated by mounting armed confrontation caused by the swelling of the jihad-ists' ranks with a considerable number of foreigners. This is reported by the Canadian contingent, which is part of the coalition forces: "The toughest fighters confronting Canada's Van Doos in Afghanistan are not Afghans but guerrillas from the volatile Russian republic of Chechnia. ... The Chechens are hard core. They are the best we face."⁷

It looks as if the fighters gradually driven away from the mountain areas of Chechnia, Dagh-estan, and Ingushetia are finding their way to other hot spots where they can use their fighting experience.

Western experts point out that new types of mercenaries have appeared among the Islamists operating in the Northwestern Frontier Province and the adjacent areas of southern Afghanistan: Europeans who embraced Islam and people from the Arab states, Northern Africa, and Turkey. Those interrogated on suspicion of being involved in terrorist activities in Germany turned out to be graduates of Islamic educational establishments in Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. They were dispatched to Pakistan via Iran to be trained for terrorist activities. One such group, for example, acted in London: in June 2005 on an assignment from al-Qa'eda they organized blasts in the Tube that killed 52.⁸

Prof. Barnet Rubin of the United States has also detected the changes in the nature of the activities and psychology of some of the political-ideological and military Taliban leaders: "These new fighters belong to neither Afghanistan nor Pakistan: they are products of refugee camps and militarized madrasas in the tribal areas of Pakistan. They have never experienced benefits of citizenship in any country, and they have never participated in any 'traditional' society based on agricultural production, pastoralism, kinship relations, and state patronage. The longer the war goes on, the more the transnational milieu that creates this group becomes deeply rooted in the region."⁹

This is a very exact observation of the changed social and political status of the new generation of Afghans who have grown up and matured in the refugee camps of the Northwestern Frontier Province. Indeed, they lived amid permanent jihad, they had to wander in search of earnings before they ended up in madrasahs where they were educated in the jihad spirit on "charity money" that arrived from the oil-rich Arab states. This was how the "new Taliban" (and the children that grew up in the Palestinian camps) were raised to become merciless and indifferent to the suffering and convictions of not only non-Muslims, but also of their coreligionists who profess classical Islam. The longer the war, the more "irreconcilable" fighters of the new type will emerge in the world.

The Pakistani government is very concerned with the foreign mercenaries that enjoy the support of the Taliban and al-Qa'eda; this makes the task of President Musharraf to fight terror even harder.

Jones and Ijaz wrote in their joint article: "Pakistan's policies regarding Afghanistan are crucial to the future stability of the entire region." They are convinced that President Musharraf would have been moving in the right direction had he invited Hamid Karzai to a regional summit also attended by Prime Minister of India Manmohan Singh and the sides' key figures in the army and intelligence. In fact, this might lead to a Triple Council to promote mutual understanding on several issues. India's presence would have "dispelled the myth" about Delhi's investments in the Afghan economy used to move closer to the borders of Pakistan. The meeting would have given the sides' special services the chance to agree on the range of potential cooperation to avoid another spell of suspicion and mistrust.

⁷ *National Post* (Canada), 24 September, 2007.

⁸ See: "Terrorists in Training Head to Pakistan," *latimes.com.*, 14 October, 2007.

⁹ B. Rubin, "Afghanistan: Negotiations with Taliban?" *Informed Comment: Global Affairs*, 16 October, 2007.

In his annual report published on 11 January, 2007, Director of U.S. National Intelligence John Negroponte pointed out: "Pakistan is a frontline partner in the war on terror. Nevertheless, it remains a major source of Islamic extremism and the home for some top terrorist leaders."¹⁰ "The prospect of renewed tension with nuclear-armed India still lingers despite improved relations, and Pakistan had been a major source of nuclear proliferation until the disruption of the A.Q. Khan's network."¹¹ At the Congress hearings on foreign policy, the senators who are convinced that the "seat of the war" their country is waging is found not in Iraq or Afghanistan, but in Pakistan, where al-Qa'eda has its headquarters, deemed it necessary to stress that it was Pakistan that helped North Korea and Iran start their nuclear programs.¹²

Jones and Ijaz believe that "NATO could play a key role in the early stages of such a joint intelligence-sharing venture [the Triple Council] to depoliticize the use of intelligence in border patrolling, narcotics control and arms trafficking."¹³ In an article that recently appeared in Kabul, the Afghan side suggested not limiting cooperation to the Triple Council, which is concerned with purely military matters, but to ask the foreign ministries of Afghanistan and Pakistan to join the process together with U.N., NATO and U.S. observers.¹⁴ The regime in Kabul was advised to take the necessary measures to check the country's gradual degradation into a narco-state and a banker of all sorts of terrorists, while Islamabad should restore its leading role in the global struggle against extremism.

We all know that the longer the conflict, the more countries it draws into its sphere of influence and the wider the range of debatable issues. After a while the war on "global terrorism" inspired the actors to formulate narrow nationalistic, separatist, and religious slogans and territorial claims. This is what is going on in Central Asia, to which the United States has shifted its "point of pressure." By doing this America not only drew its NATO allies into the whirlpool of war, but also some of the East European countries waiting in line for NATO membership.

Six years of war produced nothing but justifiable skepticism both among outside observers and the local population. The Taliban's obvious moral superiority over the enemy is the main reason why a victory over terror represented by the Taliban and al-Qa'eda cannot be expected soon. President Karzai's efforts first to draw the "moderate" wing of the Taliban, and later Taliban leader Mullah Omar, into talks and his promises of high posts in his Cabinet for the movement's members were ignored. The Taliban, sure of itself and aware of the weakness of America's position, openly states that talks will be possible when the counterterrorist coalition pulls out of the country.

This is testified by the Open Letter of the Governing Council of the Islamic Emirate to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization of 16 August, 2007 and even by the very fact that the letter appeared at all. There is another important point: The Taliban acts in the name of the leaders of the Islamic Emirate and has taken the trouble of distancing itself from the Karzai Cabinet. The document that appeared in *Al-Emirate* consists of three points. It insists that the SCO should adopt measures "to stop those people, who by economic, cultural and political influences want to preclude development from infiltration into the regional countries." The letter goes on to say that the SCO members should know that Afghanistan is "in agony" and that it needs radical changes that will shake the world similar to the developments in the Soviet Union. The Taliban warns the SCO members: "You shouldn't look at the Islamic Emirate's members from the attitude of the U.S.A. But you should realize the reality on your own. We are neither terrorists, nor strange interferers from beyond Afghanistan. However, we are defenders of our national interest." The Governing Council is convinced that the country was occu-

¹⁰ J.D. Negroponte, *Annual Threat Assessment of the Director of National Intelligence*, 11 January, 2007, p. 11.

¹¹ The reference is to the network of traders in nuclear technologies headed by Abdul Qadir Khan, the father of the Pakistani nuclear bomb (see, for example: *The Christian Science Monitor*, 27 October, 2004).

¹² See: J. Dobbins, op. cit., p. 6.

¹³ J. Jones, M. Ijaz, op. cit.

¹⁴ See: *Afghanistan Times*, 4 March, 2007.

pied, which means that the jihad should be regarded as a just and absolutely legitimate war of independence. The letter stresses its authors' continued adherence to the principle of mutual respect among the region's countries, their desire to establish "fraternal relations" with them and the hope that the SCO will help to promote positive regional developments.

The document's content and tone can be interpreted as the promise of a loyal attitude to the SCO if the latter puts pressure on the United States and NATO and squeezes them out of the country.

It was his American allies who pushed Hamid Karzai to the talks with the Taliban; the Americans themselves, who having weighed up the "pros" and "cons," were engaged in secret talks with the Islamic opposition for a long time. At the current stage of the negotiations, there are attempts to establish contacts not only with the "moderate" Islamic opposition. President Karzai openly addressed the leaders of the Islamic Emirate. Academician Primakov has written that the president of Afghanistan took the trouble of pointing out that he did not invite groups closely connected with al-Qa'eda to the negotiation table.¹⁵ This is hardly important: first, the Taliban served the foundation on which al-Qa'eda unfolded its activities in the country; second, the Taliban did not deliver bin Laden to the Americans. They could not do that for the simple reason that he was more than a guest and an ideological ally—he was a "breadwinner."

The Taliban's pressure, which put a large chunk of the country's south under their control, dampened the morale of the Afghan National Army (ANA) being set up and of the civilians. This should not be taken to mean that most of the local people would hail return of the Taliban. In this context, the term "population of Afghanistan" defies unambiguous interpretation; it rather draws attention to the perpetual ethnic tension that is mounting as the hostilities continue. There are latent and even obvious signs that the relations between the Pashtoon South and the North populated mainly by ethnic minorities are strained and are worsening. The Pashtoons insist on their titular nation status while the "Northerners," who want a federative state, remind everyone that they helped to bring down the Taliban in the fall of 2001. On 22 September, 2007, the National Congress of Afghanistan (NCA),¹⁶ a leftist structure that speaks for the national minorities, put on their site a call to stop the war and discontinue the secret talks with the Taliban. The document pointed out that the choice was between allowing the Taliban to return or war. The former meant that the country should recognize the Taliban's power, a catastrophe that would trigger armed resistance. For this reason it was suggested that the Pashtoon members of the Taliban be accepted as the dominant force in the Pashtoon provinces (in the South) to let the people in the rest of the country pursue their own development aims. This called for a federative system. The document suggested that the Durand Line should be accepted as the state border with Pakistan and that all armed groups should be completely disarmed; the country also needed a mixed economy, illiteracy should be eradicated, etc.

A federal system would have suited the country perfectly, but it is too early to talk about it (let alone set about realizing it). The Pashtoons will interpret any step in this direction as an attempt to undermine the unity of the Afghan nation.

On 26 December, 2007, President Karzai visited Pakistan, where the two presidents discussed the far from simple situation in the border regions teeming with Taliban units and jihad fighters. The presidents agreed that to step up the struggle against extremism and terrorism in the region, the special services of both countries should cooperate on a wide range of issues.¹⁷ The president of Afghanistan came for a two-day visit, which was probably cut short: on 27 December, 2007, terrorists mortally wounded potential prime minister candidate Benazir Bhutto who died in hospital.

¹⁵ See: E. Primakov, "Novaia taktika SShA v Afghanistane?" available at [<http://www.mn.ru/issue/2007-39-4>].

¹⁶ The structure was set up in 2001 and officially registered; its leader, author Latif Pedram, took part in the presidential election and came in fifth. According to its leaders, it has branches in all 34 provinces of the IRA and abroad.

¹⁷ [<http://www.novopol.ru/article33337.html>], 27 December, 2007.

Media all over the world cannot agree on who is to blame: either al-Qa'eda or ISI agents connected with Islamic extremists. Once more Pakistan was plunged into the heat of a battle between the radical Islamists and those who favored a civil society based on democratic principles. The central issue is: Who will control the country's nuclear weapons?

There has been no shortage of ill omens.

On 19 October, 2007, the day Benazir Bhutto arrived in Karachi, a blast killed 150 and wounded over 500. The Islamic circles formulated seemingly democratic demands and insisted on a civilian administration. The Islamists, however, were not satisfied with President Musharraf's promise to retire from the army if he won the presidential election and to share power with the opposition Pakistan People's Party headed by Benazir Bhutto. It looked as if the Islamists would accept nothing but the rigid power of the extreme right wing of the Islamic radicals. In this case, the term democracy, with which they operated, should be interpreted as "Islamist dictatorship."

In America, President George W. Bush's Administration felt itself threatened when the Democrats gained the majority in the U.S. Congress and loudly voiced their dissatisfaction with America's Central Asian policies. As a result, late in February 2007, President Bush sent a letter to President Musharraf in which he warned his Pakistani colleague in harsh terms that America might cut back its aid to Pakistan if he failed to take decisive measures against al-Qa'eda still headed by the elusive Osama bin Laden. The Democrats demanded that America increase its pressure on Islamabad. They relied on the opinion of the American commanders in Afghanistan about the mounting Islamist opposition encouraged by the Pakistani side's passivity and its failure to live up to its promises in the antiterrorist struggle. What is more, the White House started planning unilateral strikes on the terrorists' training camps in North Waziristan sighted by U.S. satellite intelligence.¹⁸

On 1 March, 2007, it became known that in Quetta the Pakistani security services helped by U.S. CIA investigators arrested Mullah Akhund, former defense minister in the Taliban Cabinet (1996-2001); previously the CIA had been prepared to buy information about him for \$1 million. He was taken to Islamabad, where the officers of the special services of both countries interrogated him in the hope of gleaning details about the Islamists' military potential, who had announced a "spring offensive" against the U.S. and NATO units and the National Army of Afghanistan.

On the eve of the arrest, U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney suddenly arrived in Islamabad. According to press information, he brought video evidence about the camps of the Taliban and al-Qa'eda fighters on the territory of Pakistan. The president of Pakistan, who had denied the existence of such camps on his territory, was thus shown that not merely the House Democratic majority, but also the U.S. senators were concerned about the problem: How could they explain to the American taxpayers why the antiterrorist struggle was producing no results and why the "strategic partner" failed to live up to its obligations?¹⁹

Pakistani journalist Ahmed Rashid has written in his book *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* that Pakistan failed to learn the lessons of history and continued living in the recent past when the money pouring in from Saudi Arabia and the CIA allowed Pakistan to lead the jihad.²⁰

It looked as if Islamabad was resolved to change its course: after all it abandoned Mullah Akhund to his fate; earlier Pakistan had counted on him and his supporters to influence the situation in Afghanistan and preserve tension in Kashmir. The price was too high: it was not only and not so much the money, but rather political and economic stability very much needed in Central Asia. It looks, however, as if President Musharraf cannot follow Washington's logic.

¹⁸ See: D.E. Sanger, M. Mazzetti, "Bush to Warn Pakistan to Act on Terror," *The New York Times*, 26 February, 2007.

¹⁹ See: T. Fatemi, "No Let-up in US Pressure," *Dawn* (Pakistan), 10 March, 2007.

²⁰ See: A. Rashid, *Taliban. Islam, neft i novaia bol'shaia igra v Tsentral'noy Azii*, Moscow, 2003, p. 257.

Experts in security issues in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East have pointed to the discrepancies in the American political documents related to Central Asia. On the one hand, in the next fiscal year the volumes of American aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan will increase. In 2008, Afghanistan will receive \$1.07 billion compared with \$968 million in 2007; while Pakistan will receive \$785 million (\$499 million in 2007). Out of the total amount of aid to Afghanistan, 18 percent are allocated to fighting illegal drug trafficking; about \$700 million are intended for the country's restoration. In the case of Pakistan, \$300 million should go to the military program.²¹

It turned out that Afghanistan received less than the other recipients of American aid: according to U.S. Senator James Dobbins, during the first post-Taliban year the United States allotted \$500 million to restoration, while Iraq, a much wealthier country but about the same size as Afghanistan, received \$18 billion in 2003. Further comparison produces the following figures: during the two post-Taliban years, the average Afghan received \$50 a year in foreign aid, while every Kosovo resident received 10-fold more during two years; and the average Bosnian enjoyed 12-fold more money in foreign aid.²²

The five Central Asian states could expect a slash of 24 percent in financial aid compared with 2006. Uzbekistan was punished for its human rights record, which was repeatedly criticized by the United States, and for its rejection of Western-recommended reforms. According to those in the U.S. Department of State who authored the comments on the new budget, Kazakhstan, as an oil-rich country, could go ahead without Washington's money. In this context Kyrgyzstan came forward as the main recipient of American money even if it will receive \$5 million less than two years ago; Tajikistan will receive \$3.4 million more, while American aid to Turkmenistan and its amount will depend on the new leaders' behavior. On the whole, the money will go "where there are opportunities to consolidate stability and promote democratization."²³

"The rhetoric and the numbers are at odds with one another," said Martha Brill Olcott, senior associate with the Russian & Eurasian Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "We're sending really tiny sums there [to Central Asia]," Olcott added. «The United States has had declining influence in the area and this isn't going to stop it [the decline]."²⁴ At the same time, Ms. Olcott believed "the U.S. strategy for assuring stability in Central Asia appeared to overly concentrate aid efforts on Afghanistan." Senator Dobbins, in turn, proceeds from the 2005 figures supplied by the RAND Corporation to say that out of the countries the United States has been patronizing for the last 60 years Afghanistan received the smallest sums for its "national construction" programs.²⁵

The above can be explained by the foreign policy blunders of President George W. Bush's Administration which is no longer able to respond pragmatically to the changes in the world and in Central Asia in particular. It overestimated the impact produced by the disintegration of its perpetual antagonist, the Soviet Union, and expected too much of it. American political strategists imagined that their country's military-political domination would come all by itself. Life has shown that America's closest allies hastened to exploit the changed balance of forces in Central Asia in their interests. This is particularly true of Pakistan. Its newly acquired nuclear potential (referred to with a great deal of pride as the "Islamic nuclear bomb") inspired the radical Islamists of President Musharraf's closest circle to insist on the country's greater involvement in the Great Game.

There are apprehensions that at some point Washington might run up against Pervez Musharraf's resistance; under pressure from the Islamists, the Pakistani president might even cautiously drift

²¹ See: J. Kucera, "U.S. Aid to Central Asia: "The Rhetoric and the Numbers are at Odds with One Another," *Eurasia Insight*, 2 June, 2007 [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav020607.shtml>].

²² See: J. Dobbins, op. cit., p. 3.

²³ J. Kucera, op. cit.

²⁴ Quoted from: J. Kucera, op. cit.

²⁵ J. Dobbins, op. cit.

away from his too obvious (according to his opponents) subservience to Washington. So far he is biding his time, while following the complicated developments in the United States where the Democrats won the majority in Congress. Tension in Central Asia is mounting: Benazir Bhutto's murder obviously upset the applecart.

The current developments suggest that the American-Pakistani relations are not only (and not so much) the key issue. The U.S. Administration is deliberately maintaining "controlled instability" in some of the countries (especially those in which the leaders are resolved to pursue independent policies). In the past, this allowed Washington to put pressure on the "recalcitrant" regimes, to remove them, and to provoke the use of force. Today, it has become clear to everyone that the myth about the Iraqi WMD and the contacts between Hussein and al-Qa'eda was put into circulation because America had its eye on the country's oil reserves. To gain control over Iran's gas and oil fields and the Strait of Hormuz, a strategically important stretch of the fuel transportation routes, the United States is working hard to knock together an anti-Iranian coalition; it needs international support to be able to use force to deal with the Iranian nuclear file. It would have been wiser to act within international law and to rely on the IAEA experts to avoid tension.

The "democratization" measures the United States has implemented or is implementing in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the APR are allowing Washington to widen its military presence there; it is consistently moving into Eastern Europe too.

The American Administration behaves inflexibly even in its relations with the regions and countries hypocritically described as partners. This has alienated the "empire" from the rest of the world. Prominent American political scientist Steven Cohen admitted that he got rid of the diplomatic husk early in 2003.²⁶ He believes that it was not because of the Balkan war or the counterterrorist operation against the Taliban in Afghanistan and not even because of America's war on Iraq that Russian-American relations went sour. Gorbachev and Reagan were the first to start talking about "partnership relations" between the two countries; George Bush Sr. continued in the same vein. For eight years, presidents Yeltsin and Clinton spared no effort to assure one another of "American-Russian friendship and partnership." Steven Cohen, however, pointed out that his country was guided by a very simple principle: Moscow should obey Washington's command. The American political analyst went on to say that as a result the United States got almost everything it needed from Russia. Russia, in turn, got practically nothing. Russia helped the United States liquidate the terrorist threat in Afghanistan. Today, however, everyone knows that the Taliban was "temporarily cornered," that NATO (headed by the United States) assumed responsibility for "bringing law and order to the country," while American military bases, which look like a permanent rather than temporary feature, appeared in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It is a strange partnership indeed, concludes Steven Cohen, when one of the partners was busy encircling the other with military bases. There was no partnership, says the American analyst. It was nothing but a myth.

Other American partners have their doubts about the strategies. To dissipate them, the leaders of the largest European states visited Afghanistan one after another: late in 2007 Kabul received German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy, Prime Minister of Italy Romano Prodi, and his Australian colleague Kevin Rudd, to say nothing of the top NATO officials who frequented the country.

Daniele Ganser of France is convinced that "from the American point of view this boils down to a struggle to gain control over the energy resources of the Eurasian bloc found in the 'strategic ellipse' stretching from Azerbaijan across Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, and the Persian Gulf." It is in this region, says the French analyst, which is extremely rich in oil and gas

²⁶ See: interview with S. Cohen: "Partnerstvo? Eto fiktsia," *Tribuna (Delovoy vtornik)*, 2 April, 2003.

and which is the scene of the so-called war on terror that another round of the “geostrategic game” is going on, which “the European Union is sure to lose.” As soon as the United States establishes its control over the local energy resources and the energy crisis becomes even more obvious, America will confront the EU with certain conditions. “The United States will never give its gas and oil free to the European countries. Few are aware of the fact that the North Sea has reached the peak oil and that Norway and Great Britain have already passed the maximum figures and that oil production is steadily decreasing.”²⁷

Prof. Ganser hopes that sooner or later people will realize that the “antiterrorist wars” are nothing but manipulations, while the accusations hurled at the Muslims are (at least partly) propaganda. Europe should wake up to the truth about the “destabilization strategy,” it should learn to say “No” to the United States, where there are many people who do not want continued militarization of international relations.

Other states can do a lot to bring down Central Asian tension. Witness the statement made by a spokesman of the Foreign Ministry of Russia on 27 December, 2007. The document said: “Being aware of the main task of regional security and the need to resolve the Afghan problem in particular, the SCO can take specific measures designed to improve the situation. To make its efforts even more effective it should invite the observer states—Iran and Pakistan in particular—to join the process.”²⁸

The tragic events in Pakistan have confirmed that all the Central Asian states should pool their efforts to achieve mutual understanding when working on decisions that will add stability to the region. Some of the American political analysts agree with this and suggest that the SCO should be included in the process.

In his lecture of 16 January, 2008,²⁹ Assistant Professor of Political Science at Barnard College Alexander Cooley refuted the opinion of those who regard the SCO as a military bloc set up to balance off NATO, on the one hand, and as a “talking shop” unable to take practical measures, on the other, as completely wrong.

“I do not think that the SCO is a ‘talking shop’,” said he. “It is neither a trade nor a military organization. Despite this, it is growing fast and stands firmly on its own. It offers numerous boons to its members and is an attractive alternative to other international organizations.” “The weaker SCO members can influence its stronger partners: both Russia and China listen to their opinion,” said Alexander Cooley.

He said that the U.S. and the West as a whole fear Iran’s potential SCO membership but, he pointed out, “the Central Asian countries have the right to set up their own alliances.” The European Union and the United States have their own interests in Central Asia, pointed out Cooley and added: “They should talk to the SCO and learn to cooperate with it—many of the Western politicians share this opinion.” This is the right road: The SCO has already established close ties with the U.N. and is developing contacts with other international organizations, the OSCE in particular.

Stability in tumultuous Central Asia depends on the goodwill of all regional states resolved to realize principles of democracy, mutual understanding, and international security.

²⁷ Interview with Daniele Ganser in Silvia Cattori, “Il terrorismo non rivendicato della NATO. La strategia della tensione,” *Voltaire* (France), 11 January, 2007.

²⁸ [www.regnum.ru/news/938379.html], 27 December, 2007.

²⁹ Quoted from: [www.regnum.ru/news/943740.html], 17 January, 2008.