

## U.S. CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY UNDER PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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### *Introduction*

There can be no doubt that during the eighteen months it has been in power, the Obama Administration has in due course defined the main vectors and priorities of U.S. foreign policy, determined the country's key geopolitical interests, drawn up and adopted a National Security Strategy, and compiled a Nuclear Policy Review.

The following factors are having an impact on U.S. policy in the post-Soviet expanse, which includes Central Asia (CA): relations with Russia, the PRC, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), Turkey, Pakistan, and India; the military operation in Afghanistan; NATO's enlargement; the energy factor; the coordination strategy between the West and the European Union (EU); and the problem of radical Islam.

Since the beginning of his presidency, Barack Obama has designated intensification of the U.S.'s influence in the Asia Pacific Region (APR) and further development of relations with China as the priority vectors of his foreign policy.

In order to help the American economy recover from its severe crisis, the U.S. tried to create a geopolitical alliance with the PRC (a duumvirate of world administration), but Beijing rejected this proposal.

Another main issue (apart from recovery from the crisis) for the Obama Administration is bringing the war on so-called international terrorism (meaning the military operation in Afghanistan in particular) to its successful conclusion.

This means that the foreign policy strategy of the present-day American Democrats hinges on the geopolitical situation in Central Asia, while also keeping in mind Russia's interests.

The current U.S. administration is keeping a close strategic eye on the Central Asian region, particularly after the events in Kyrgyzstan. This is posing both new threats and new opportunities for the CA countries in the context of reinforcing the geopolitical balance in the region.

A decision was adopted recently to reduce the level of the U.S.'s military presence in Afghanistan with subsequent withdrawal from this country (presumably between 2011 and 2014). If this happens, the security situation in CA, Afghanistan, and Pakistan could drastically change for the worse.

It appears that the U.S. is no longer making democratization the fundamental principle of its foreign policy. The Obama Administration realizes that establishing democracy does not boil down to perfunctorily introducing election procedures into a country, but depends on the conditions within the country itself being ripe for such changes and on creating a socioeconomic and political infrastructure, which requires many years of effort. The U.S. intends to make use of "intelligent" power (which presumes a combination of "hard" and "soft" power). Today preference is being given not to combat action, but to political and economic methods, as well as to diplomacy and cultural ties.

On the whole, experts characterize the foreign policy of the Obama Administration as contradictory and inconsistent. The main reasons for this, in their opinion, are the current president's

lack of experience in international affairs and, more importantly, the very unfavorable situation in the U.S. with respect to the national and global economy.

## **Principles, Methods, and Tasks of Barack Obama's Central Asian Policy**

According to the Central Asian policymakers in the Obama Administration, the U.S. must overcome the internal structural contradiction in its policy in the new circumstances, as well as resolve three vitally important problems:

1. Mistrust of the CA states regarding the U.S.'s efforts to establish democracy in the region's republics. Before launching its Central Asian policy, the White House, in order to improve its image, would do well to strengthen its contacts with the governments of the region's countries.
2. Russia's opposition, which does not suit U.S. policy.
3. The situation in Afghanistan.

On the whole, American experts are very skeptical about the prospects for implementing the Greater Central Asia (GCA) concept Barack Obama inherited from the George Bush Administration.

Washington has determined the objectives and tasks that form the foundation of GCA for the mid and long term. So, although implementation of the project is encountering all kinds of problems, this does not mean that this vital geopolitical matter should be removed from the agenda.

Today, the U.S.'s interests in the region go beyond the framework of GCA, and in the foreseeable future they will be implemented on the basis of existing projects and bilateral agreements with the CA states.

On the whole, the GCA project is only part of Washington's strategic plans aimed at transforming the whole of Eurasia into an extensive U.S.-controlled geo-economic expanse that includes the Caspian region, CA, the Middle East, and South Asia (SA). So, in theory, a "sanitary cordon" could be created along Russia's and China's borders. This scenario would enlarge the geopolitical field of the region's rivals, which fully meets the White House's interests.

The main adjustments in U.S. policy amount to restoring several posts and subdivisions in the administration and creating an SA and CA department, strengthening Afghanistan's role in integration of the Asian countries and formation of GCA, using the North-South transportation corridor to diversify export of energy resources from CA, applying different strategic approaches, and turning Kazakhstan into a regional leader and so-called corridor of reform. In addition, there are also plans to focus greater attention on the role of education and nongovernmental organizations in promoting democracy in CA (this process is still arousing a certain amount of concern in the region).

The U.S. is adjusting its Central Asian policy in light of the mistakes made by the former White House administration.

American experts point to three serious mistakes of the U.S.'s CA policy in the past:

1. When resolving various problems of the region's states, the U.S. did not even attempt to coordinate the positions of different government departments.
2. The specifics of the CA countries and people, as well as of the region as a whole were not taken into account.
3. The U.S. did not coordinate its actions with the activity of other external actors.

After the Democrats headed by Barack Obama came to power, it was expected that Washington would begin actively revising its strategy in CA and, in particular, reject the GCA concept.

In order to continue the war and equip the American contingent in Afghanistan, Washington needs a reliable route through the territory of the CIS countries (including the CA states), otherwise the transit of cargo will be impossible from the security point of view (due to the political instability in Pakistan and aggravation of its relations with India). So we are talking about further enlargement of the American military presence in the Central Asian countries, which, it is hoped, will play a vitally important role in supporting the U.S.'s military operation in Afghanistan.

The U.S.'s plans for Afghanistan have led several CA countries to hope for a significant increase in American aid and investments. But they were also worried that Washington would use the antiterrorist operation to provide a more permanent base for its military contingents in the region (a similar situation existed in 2001-2002).

Another vector of American policy in need of adjustment in the region is the U.S.'s attitude toward the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The White House believes that this organization is controlled by Russia and establishing relations with it will mean recognizing the CSTO as a legitimate member of the international community.

So Washington needs to maintain at least minimum contact with the Russian Federation and PRC regarding the most important problems arising in the CA countries, since this will help to promote the development of relations with the region's countries, as well as eliminate the possibility of criticism from Moscow and Beijing about the U.S. exclusively pursuing its own interests.

It stands to reason that Barack Obama's policy in the Central Asian region should correct the mistakes of the White House's former administration. First of all, there must be stronger coordination among the U.S.'s various government departments (the State Department and Pentagon in particular).

On the whole, however, the Obama Administration has inherited sufficiently powerful levers from its predecessors that ensure its strong and regular impact on the CA countries from the position of so-called soft power. This implies the many different funds and their branches, information and cultural centers, American "corners" and councils, and so on that have appeared in the region. There are 22 of them in Kazakhstan, 15 in Kyrgyzstan, 9 in Tajikistan, 5 in Turkmenistan, and 1 in Uzbekistan (not to mention the programs broadcast by Voice of America in Uzbek).

But as it transpired, the Obama Administration does not have a clear conception of its policy in CA. U.S. interests in the region are primarily related to ensuring the transit of military cargo for the U.S. and NATO coalition troops in Afghanistan.

Barack Obama's attention was drawn once more to the Central Asian region when the turmoil broke out in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010. The White House assumed a position that implied that such countries as Russia (the CSTO leader) and Kazakhstan (chairman of the OSCE) should take responsibility for stability in this republic (and in the region as a whole).

The new landlord of the White House is still placing top priority on strengthening cooperation between the U.S. (along with the EU) and the CA states in the energy industry. The stakes are being placed on further Americanization of the Caspian and on reorienting the flows of Caspian oil and gas resources toward Europe. The U.S. and its partners in the EU will continue to exert efforts to ensure

that the main oil and gas pipelines link the Central Asian region and the European markets without passing through Russia.

The global financial crisis and drop in world energy prices could lead to the curtailment of several energy projects lobbied by Washington in the Caspian. Despite this, however, the Central Asian region will remain an arena for playing out the intense competitive struggle between the U.S. and Russia.

### **The U.S. and Kazakhstan**

At present, the U.S. is developing contacts most successfully with Kazakhstan (largely because the republic is the chairman of the OSCE). The U.S. regards Kazakhstan as an ambitious, influential, and predictable political player (in contrast to some of the other CA countries) not only in the Central Asian region, but also throughout the post-Soviet expanse.

On the basis of the industrial-innovative strategy being implemented in the republic, U.S. investment companies and banks that regard Kazakhstan as a promising developing market have stepped up their activity. Washington also thinks that Kazakhstan's membership in the Customs Union should not prevent its possible future membership in the WTO.

At present, American agroindustrial companies and enterprises engaged in the delivery of medical equipment and educational institutions that would like to invest in projects being implemented in the republic are actively developing cooperation with Kazakhstan. But it should be presumed that the current share of funds going into the oil industry and that being allotted to other branches of Kazakhstan's economy will not change; oil, gas, and affiliated transport routes will continue to account, as before, for 65% of American investments.

During the years bilateral economic relations have been developing (since 1993), the U.S. has invested \$14.3 billion in the Kazakhstan economy (mainly in the oil and gas industry and affiliated services). But at present, export from the U.S. to Kazakhstan has fallen to the 2005 level; in 2009 it amounted to \$600 million, although there was a time when it reached \$1 billion. Equipment for the oil industry accounts for 40% of this sum, transport technology for 25%, and computers, telecommunications, electronics, and the chemical industry for the rest.

American analysts regard Kazakhstan as the most influential state in the region, but its territory (the largest among the CA countries) is too extensive for the small population to control. Moreover, Kazakhstan borders on Russia and depends on it for oil and natural gas transit to the West. Perhaps over time, when the infrastructure projects begin working, the situation will change.

On the eve of the Russian-Georgian war, Kazakhstan tried to find export alternatives for its rich energy resources, including pipelines via the Caspian Sea and to China. However, the construction of these routes is not complete, and this means that any agreements between Kazakhstan and the U.S. must be approved by Russia. As American analysts believe, the republic will not take the risk and act on its own.

When the U.S. and NATO leadership succeeded in coming to terms with essentially all the main states that border on Afghanistan about the transit of non-military cargo for the coalition forces mission, the question was raised of inviting new countries and military contingents to participate in this operation. Kazakhstan's candidacy was examined as early as the beginning of 2008 (during the term of the George Bush administration), before the decision to enlarge the coalition military operation in Afghanistan had been made.

American representatives regularly used diplomatic channels to explore the possibility of Kazakhstan's participation in such an operation, highly evaluating the part the republic's servicemen played

in the Iraqi mission. It was tentatively suggested that similar cooperation might also be pursued in Afghanistan. This cooperation implied recruiting Kazakh servicemen as staff officers, army medics, and field engineers for training Afghans to demine their own territory (just as the Kazakh servicemen had done in Iraq).

This makes us wonder why Astana in particular was offered this opportunity. NATO correctly presumed that the armed forces of other CA states would not be able to interact efficiently with NATO structures in Afghanistan, since not one of them, apart from Kazakhstan, has had experience with working jointly with the alliance. In addition, it is Kazakhstan of all the region's countries that is carrying out an active pro-Western policy. Astana is participating much more actively in NATO's Partnership for Peace program than its closest regional neighbors.

Some Russian experts think that the possible participation of Kazakhstan's armed forces in the Afghan operation is a prerequisite for closer cooperation between this country and NATO. By conducting an independent military policy, Astana is considered to be departing from its pro-Russian course.

The question of an independent state participating in military operations lies entirely within the competence of its parliament and president; there is nothing extraordinary in the possibility of sending Kazakh servicemen to Afghanistan (particularly since the presence of the coalition forces there is legalized by U.N. mandate). Moreover, this development of events would make Kazakh diplomacy even more multivectoral.

Nevertheless, Russia and the CSTO structures might react very negatively to Kazakhstan's participation in the Afghan operation being implemented under NATO's leadership.

It is very likely that by following its foreign political interests to strengthen cooperation with the West and raise its international prestige, Kazakhstan will join the operation in Afghanistan. But the possible negative consequences of such a step must also be kept in mind: loss of personnel, the Afghan population's displeasure at the direct presence of Kazakh servicemen in the country's territory, and a negative public opinion being formed with respect to Astana's military policy.

So Kazakhstan signing an agreement on transit to Afghanistan will raise Moscow's role. This also applies to the CA countries. By activating its policy with respect to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan should be ready for changes in Russia's position.

There is no doubt that relations with the U.S. traditionally occupy an important place among Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities. Despite all the changes in the world balance of forces, America will long remain the most powerful global power.

The U.S.'s active policy in energy security directly affects the interests of CA and the Caspian region. Washington is insistently pushing through the idea of diversifying export routes and opposing the appearance of monopolies in this sphere.

Further development of the CA countries, including Kazakhstan, greatly depends on how the problem of Iran's nuclear program is resolved. Astana recognizes Tehran's right to the peaceful atom and is in favor of a diplomatic solution to all problems. In this respect, the Obama Administration was quite positive about the idea of creating a nuclear fuel bank in Kazakhstan.

The U.S. is also an important partner of Kazakhstan in the investment sphere (the total amount of American investments in the republic's economy, as well as in the fuel and energy complex and high technology has already topped \$15 billion). In this respect, the Kazakh-American initiative on state-private partnership could play an important role.

Kazakhstan, as the U.S.'s key partner in Central Asia, should continue to maintain friendly and constructive relations with Washington, developing a strategic dialog with respect to all the main vectors of cooperation (political, economic, and military), as well as regarding security and the development of democracy.

On the whole, Kazakhstan is a predictable and understandable partner for Washington, cooperation with which can be characterized as an important and key link in U.S. foreign policy on the Central Asian region. A confidential and constructive dialog has long been established between the two states.

At present, Kazakhstan's main goal is to ensure the U.S.'s participation in the OSCE summit to be held in December 2010, which will make it possible to promote Kazakh-American relations to a new level.

### **The U.S. and Kyrgyzstan**

The Kyrgyz authorities' decision to close the American airbase at Manas came as a surprise to the Obama Administration. Washington regarded this airbase as a key transit point through which additional contingents of troops could be sent to Afghanistan. Moreover, Manas was to be used to compensate for the decrease in shipments via the Pakistani route.

The U.S. expert community was the first to react to the situation that developed around the Manas base, seeing Moscow's hand in Bishkek's actions. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of the fact that Kurmanbek Bakiev's statement on closing the base came at the same time as Kyrgyzstan entered an unprecedented agreement on Russian financial and economic aid to the republic.

Head of the Pentagon Robert Gates was more reticent about this. He noted in particular that Russia was trying to take advantage of everything associated with closing the American airbase in Kyrgyzstan, the base being of immense importance for sending troops and cargo to Afghanistan, particularly since there are plans to double the U.S. military presence in this country next year.

In the context of the Great Game, the decision to close the Manas base was not at all accidental. In the context of the rivalry between the U.S. and Russia in the post-Soviet expanse and other regions of Eurasia, measures to curtail America's permanent presence in Kyrgyzstan are quite logical; they reveal the depth of the contradictions between the sides that were manifested with particular clarity during George Bush's second presidential term.

As we know, at that time, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev confirmed that Bishkek was willing to discuss with Washington ways to further use the Manas airbase, for example, for transporting non-military freight for the needs of the antiterrorist coalition in Afghanistan. In principle, this decision suited both the new U.S. administration (since it made it possible for it to "save face" and not look like the losing side) and Russia, which, in the final analysis, is not interested in undermining the position of the Western coalition in Afghanistan.

And finally, the version proposed by Kurmanbek Bakiev was also very acceptable for Kyrgyzstan itself; it means that the republic was maintaining its relations with the U.S. and not losing money by foregoing the base in Manas.

China has also been showing an interest in this kind of compromise, which, keeping in mind the vulnerability of the U.S.'s position in CA, could put a certain amount of pressure on it.

The question of opening a U.S. military facility in the republic was considered even before the events in April 2010 that led to the overthrow of President Bakiev. A center for training Kyrgyz special forces costing \$5.5 million was to be established in the Batken Region. The American side had previously allotted several million dollars to build similar training centers.

In May 2010, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs George Krol visited the region. He held consultations in which representatives of the new Kyrgyz leadership and Russian officials participated. This visit demonstrated Washington's visible concern about the development of the situation in Kyrgyzstan, since it threatened U.S. interests in the region.

The U.S. intends to cooperate with international organizations—the U.N., OSCE, IMF, and World Bank—with respect to rendering economic aid to Bishkek. At the same time, the U.S. is continuing to implement programs that were launched before the revolution; they are aimed at supporting the development of democracy, the economy, as well as the free and independent media. Moreover, the U.S. rendered technical support to holding the referendum and latest elections, including via American nongovernmental organizations.

It is worth noting that in June of 2010 the Pentagon temporarily stopped its refueling planes, which support the military operation in Afghanistan, from filling up at the Manas airport. At that time, NATO Special Representative for Central Asia and the Caucasus Robert Simmons also visited the country.

It appears that the American command is concerned about the development of the situation in Kyrgyzstan and does not exclude the possibility of closing the Transit Center at Manas.

### **The U.S. and Uzbekistan**

A slightly different situation is developing in relations between the U.S. and Uzbekistan, which is still theoretically an important link in the entire Central Asian security system. Despite the fact that Uzbekistan's officials have been making loud statements about the joint fight against international terrorism and assistance to the coalition forces in carrying out the operation in Afghanistan, Washington has long lost confidence in Tashkent's policy.

Washington regards Uzbekistan as the central and most significant player in the region. This state has regional hegemonic ambitions and has more opportunity than other states to stand up to Moscow. There are large Uzbek diasporas in all the neighboring states, which makes it possible for Tashkent to intervene in their policy. In contrast to other post-Soviet states of the region (apart from Kazakhstan), Uzbekistan is self-sufficient in terms of food and energy.

Uzbekistan is the most important potential partner for the U.S.; in contrast to Kazakhstan, it borders not on Russia, but on Afghanistan, with which it has road and railway connections. There is also a Soviet military base in the republic, which the Americans have already used.

The events of recent months have shown that, despite the Russian-Georgian war, Uzbekistan is not worried about Russia making any abrupt moves. American analysts are taking particular note of this fact.

At present, Uzbekistan is potentially growing in importance for the U.S. It provides the shortest and most reliable routes for shipping cargo. But here too the U.S. is showing a certain amount of caution, not convinced that the Uzbek side will act as predicted in any given situation.

In principle, the Uzbek and U.S. presidents have still not managed to establish a stable and reliable dialog and personal contacts, but they intend to develop their relations further to the extent possible.

Washington is very well aware that Islam Karimov is unpredictable not only for the U.S., but also for the other leading world players in this region, Russia, China, and the EU countries.

Since the Americans have decided to lay their Afghan route in the direction of the so-called Northern Corridor (through the territory of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan), Uzbekistan has become a key link in carrying out NATO's military operation.

In addition, the Americans have made the tactical decision to replace the Manas airbase with the Navoi aerodrome (with Tashkent's consent), the necessary reconstruction of which will be done by South Korean specialists. At present, the U.S. is using its runways for carrying out non-military shipments.

In principle, the Uzbek leadership has also given the go-ahead to NATO's more intensive use of this route, even if the latter continues to take advantage of the Manas airbase.

It appears that Uzbek President Islam Karimov has recently been considering withdrawing from alliances with Russia—the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and CSTO. Uzbekistan's orientation toward the U.S. and the West might have an impact on the geopolitical balance of forces existing in the region (primarily undermining Russia's position) and launch the republic into the next round of the struggle for regional leadership.

In 2009, a warming trend was felt in the relations between the two states. In 2010, the U.S. offered to cooperate with Uzbekistan in programs to support the American troops in Afghanistan, and Tashkent offered Washington the services of the Navoi airport for supplying its troops.

But experts believe that these moves cannot be classified as an ultimate change in Tashkent's geopolitical orientation. The matter more likely concerns a tactical move by Islam Karimov, who finds it more beneficial to engage in closer cooperation with the EU and U.S.

At the end of January 2010, after the first round of Uzbek-American political consultations (they were initiated by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Robert Blake, who visited Tashkent in October 2009), Islam Karimov signed a Cooperation Plan with the U.S. for 2010 that envisages interaction in the political, social, and economic spheres, as well as in security matters.

The paragraph that concerns cooperation in security calls for organizing training and retraining of Uzbekistan's officers (study courses and training sessions) at the U.S.'s leading military education institutions, including within the framework of the International Military Education and Training Program (IMET).

In addition to ensuring security of borders and combating the spread of terrorism, the sides will cooperate within the Foreign Military Financing and Excess Defense Articles Transfer programs. Moreover, Uzbekistan and the U.S. will exchange information and undertake corresponding measures to prevent threats associated with the transit of non-military shipments through the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). There are also plans to join forces to build the Khairaton–Mazari-Sharif railroad.

Uzbek companies have already built 11 bridges along the Mazari-Sharif–Kabul route and are finishing the construction of a 275-mile high-voltage transmission line capable of transmitting 150 MW of electricity from Termez to Kabul. During the second half of the year, there were plans to carry out a special undertaking with the Atlantic Council to implement Uzbekistan's regional security initiatives and create a "6+3" Contact Group for Afghanistan under the auspices of the U.N. Implementing various projects in agriculture, industry, and power engineering have also been included in the cooperation plan.

In the economic sphere, the U.S. has plans to increase assistance to Uzbekistan to modernize its irrigation systems, restore degraded land, and use new technology to raise the harvest yield of farm crops.

It should be noted that the main reason for the foreign policy rapprochement between Islam Karimov's government and the Obama Administration is the Trans-Afghan Transport Corridor project, which will give Uzbekistan access to the ports of the Indian Ocean.

At present, Uzbekistan is emphasizing its key role in peaceful settlement of the situation in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the republic has no intentions of becoming a U.S. vassal. The Uzbeks are pragmatically prompting American representatives to cooperate, while keeping a reasonable distance.

It should also be noted that Washington is worried about Tashkent becoming too involved in the ongoing ethnic conflict in South Kyrgyzstan with the aim of helping its fellow countrymen and preventing export of the revolution to Uzbekistan. At the same time, in the event of large-scale destabilization of the region, the U.S. is not excluding Tashkent's more active role as the most influence military force in the Ferghana Valley.



### ***The U.S. and Turkmenistan***

As Western observers note, Turkmenistan has recently become a new arena of rivalry between Russia and the U.S. in the CA region. The matter primarily concerns the fight over the direction of the main gas pipeline (meaning the competition between Nabucco and the Caspian pipeline). Moreover, there is competition over the training of servicemen and delivery of hardware. Russia is still trying to draw Turkmenistan into military relations by means of its participation in the Joint CIS Air Defense System, for example.

In turn, the U.S. is continuing to show an interest in establishing its air bases in Turkmenistan, the territory of which, being a transportation-transit corridor, is important for continuing the coalition operation in Afghanistan.

By increasing its cooperation with Turkmenistan, the U.S. is guided not only by its own interests, but is primarily trying to ensure Europe's energy security. For this purpose, American companies intend to increase their participation in developing Turkmen fields. In March of this year, an International Business Forum on the problems of hydrocarbon production in Turkmenistan was held in Ashgabad, which promoted further strengthening of economic contacts between the two countries.

American analysts believe (drawing a parallel with Georgia) that Turkmenistan's geographic location makes it possible for it to break away from Russia owing to the following circumstances:

1. Turkmenistan does not border on Russia (moreover, most of its population is concentrated in the far south of the country, that is, as far away as possible from Russia).
2. The country has a border with one of the major regional powers—Iran.
3. The infrastructure that joins Turkmenistan with Russia passes through two states.
4. Russia depends on the export of Turkmen gas (and not vice versa), which greatly complicates its attempts to strengthen its influence in the republic.

Turkmenistan will be able to play one of the main roles in implementing America's plans, which envisage building new routes for making deliveries to Afghanistan without passing through Russia. But it will be very difficult to ship cargo and personnel by rail from Turkey through Georgia and Azerbaijan and then send them across the Caspian Sea to a Turkmen port and on by land to Afghanistan.

Nevertheless, Turkmenistan is not showing any particular desire to establish closer ties with the U.S. The situation may change only if personal contact can be established between the presidents of the two countries. In this respect, it should be noted that Turkmenistan's new president, Gurbanguly Berdimukammedov, has shown himself to be quite active in foreign policy, visiting NATO headquarters in Brussels for the first time, where the sides agreed to intensify relations in several key spheres.

The Pentagon continues to hope that cooperation will develop with Ashgabad. In June 2008, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Vice Admiral Kevin J. Cosgriff and Rear Admiral William Gortney visited Ashgabad where they met with the republic's Defense Minister and Head of the State Border Service. But Turkmenistan's leadership has never taken any decisive steps toward establishing military cooperation with the U.S., since it is still probably worried about preserving its power.

Turkmenistan is of interest to the U.S. not only because it has a common border with Afghanistan, but also because there are abandoned military facilities in its territory not far from the Afghan border which could be a potential replacement for the Manas base. However, Ashgabad still does not

fully trust the West and is not entering any transactions with it (in 2008, some voiced the opinion that the West might have been involved in the attempted coup).

The U.S. and EU hope that under the current leader Ashghabad will become much more pro-Western oriented and will develop the European vector in its foreign policy.

As before, the West has its sights set on reorienting the gas flows from Turkmenistan to Europe and making this republic less dependent on the pipelines that pass through Russian territory. Special U.S. State Department Envoy Richard Morningstar, who regularly visits Ashghabad, has repeatedly tried to convince the Turkmen president of the importance of partnership with Washington, primarily in the energy sphere (he cites energy cooperation between the U.S. and Kazakhstan as an example).

The American side repeatedly emphasizes that the more actively the Turkmen leadership permits U.S. companies to enter the republic, the more intensively the political and military ties between the two states will develop. The Afghan coalition operation and Turkmenistan's indirect participation in it (meaning rendering the NATO troops all kinds of transit and supply services) will make it possible for the republic to count on increasing business and investment partnership with the U.S.

The Turkmen leadership asked the EU to examine the possibility of gas delivery from Turkmenistan to Europe through Iran (using the recently built gas pipeline from Dovletabad, which has a throughput capacity of 12 bcm of gas a year), bypassing Azerbaijan, but the U.S. was categorically against such an alternative.

### ***The U.S. and Tajikistan***

A new round in the U.S.'s political activity in Tajikistan began after former ambassador to the U.S. Khamrokhon Zarifi was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs of the republic in December 2006. This showed Dushanbe's willingness to step up bilateral cooperation.

In May 2007, NATO made a decision to increase the transit of shipments through Tajikistan (for the ongoing military campaign of the coalition forces in Afghanistan). In so doing, Russia was assured that there was no intention of increasing the actual size of the North Atlantic Alliance's contingent in Tajikistan. NATO representative Robert Simmons, who visited Dushanbe in May 2007, took part in this discussion.

With respect to enlargement of the Afghan operation, Tajikistan could essentially become the U.S.'s main partner and ally in CA. It should be noted that cooperation between Washington and Dushanbe has become much more active recently, although the Tajik side has still not made any specific statements that make it possible for the U.S. to regard Emomali Rakhmon as a reliable and predictable partner.

By the time the Americans made it understood that they were open to talks with all interested CA countries on matters of transit of military and non-military shipments, as well as creating temporary bases, the Tajik leadership had expressed its clear dissatisfaction with Russia's policy regarding the already long planned building of the Rogun Hydropower Plant.

The U.S. has long stopped criticizing Emomali Rakhmon's domestic policy; it prefers to wait until it becomes clear how events will further develop around the coalition forces' Afghan mission. Nor should we forget that at the current stage Tajikistan is important for the U.S. not as a target of beneficial economic investments, but as a strategic springboard against the Taliban in Afghanistan. And whether Tajikistan becomes one of the U.S.'s new partners in CA (including the possible deploy-

ment of military bases in the republic) will depend on how cooperation between Washington and Dushanbe develops in the future.

The U.S. has already been rendering Tajikistan significant economic aid; for example, two bridges were built across the border river Panj, as well as two other bridges linking the republic with Afghanistan. For Tajikistan, which has long been in the grips of a transportation blockade imposed by Uzbekistan, direct access to the shores of the Indian ocean (via Afghanistan) is of immense importance.

The situation currently developing in cooperation between the U.S. and Tajikistan is radically changing, since bringing the Afghan operation to its logical conclusion is one of the foreign policy priorities of the Obama Administration.

As of today, the Americans can offer this kind of expanded cooperation (including the creation of U.S. military bases) to any of the CA states. Dushanbe has the opportunity to make its support of the Afghan campaign of the coalition forces hinge on economic projects that are beneficial to it.

The U.S. has been offering the Tajik leadership the most diverse assistance, and Dushanbe, which has very scanty financial resources, has been unable to refuse it. At the present stage, the total amount of money America has allotted to Tajikistan already tops \$1 billion, and this figure could essentially increase in the future.

Tajikistan has quite a good opportunity for suggesting that the U.S. deploy stations in its territory for servicing the troops participating in the operation in Afghanistan (at least), which means striking while the iron is hot.

In addition to building new bridges and rendering financial support in implementing aid programs in various spheres, it might be possible to interest the U.S. in issuing a loan for building the Rogun Hydropower Plant already mentioned, as well as other hydropower facilities. It goes without saying that in this case the Americans will try not to simply allot certain funds, but to invest them in the form of technology and equipment.

In order to safeguard itself against Afghan instability and implement projects to build energy facilities, Tajikistan will have to make non-standard political decisions.

After intensification of the financial crisis and change in the administration in the White House, the U.S. tried to probe the possibility of further increasing its influence in the CA region. This was related to enlargement of the military operation in Afghanistan.

In mid-November 2008, U.S. State Department Representative George Krol visited Dushanbe. At a meeting with the President of Tajikistan, he said that the change in the American administration would in no way influence Washington's policy regarding CA, which was extremely important for stability throughout the whole of the Asian continent. George Krol assured Emomali Rakhmon that the world crisis would not have an effect on the amount of financial aid to the region's countries.

The U.S. positively evaluates the measures undertaken by President Emomali Rakhmon to ensure stability in the republic. They include endowing the security service with special authorities for opposing Islamic fundamentalists and applying repressive measures against instructors of underground madrasahs suspected of proselytism.

It should be noted that the republic considers itself to be one of Russia's most devoted allies. Tajikistan has never had American military bases in its territory and has not advanced military cooperation with NATO, while all proposals regarding cooperation are primarily aimed at Moscow. Moreover, Russia has a good chance of winning in the military rivalry for influence in Tajikistan. It has two military bases in the republic, and also arms and trains Tajik servicemen.

At the same time, according to several experts, Tajikistan is regarded as the most pro-Western state in the region, despite Moscow's attempts to put pressure on Emomali Rakhmon.

Relations with Russia are still one of Tajikistan's foreign policy priorities. But both sides are well aware that Russia far from always shows an economic interest in implementing a given joint project and frequently does not have enough financial resources to carry it out.

This situation could tip the scales in favor of the U.S. and China (with its multi-billion investments) and turn Russia into just another regional player.

At the beginning of February 2010, bilateral political consultations were held in Washington between Tajikistan and the U.S., during which the sides intended to examine issues concerning the political-economic situation in the region, implementation of hydropower and transportation projects, as well as the situation in Afghanistan.

The Tajik authorities are willing to ask the U.S. to invest in various branches of the country's economy, primarily in power engineering. Dushanbe is perfectly aware that its overseas partners might be interested in those projects that are in one way or another related to Afghanistan. According to experts, tired of waiting for Moscow to provide the assistance it needs, Tajikistan is turning its sights to Washington.

According to some analysts, in the context of the difficult economic situation in Tajikistan, President Rakhmon is left with increasingly fewer opportunities for retaining control over the country. Dushanbe is worried about only one thing—where to get money from. Today, the U.S. and China (in contrast to the U.S., it is interested only in obtaining its own economic gain, without the political component) are the main sources of funding the republic needs; Russia has removed itself from the picture, while the EU is issuing small loans and grants that cannot have a significant influence on the domestic political and economic situation in the country.

The U.S. is working in Tajikistan in keeping with the traditional pattern: it is issuing grants to develop civil society institutions, carry out reforms of the self-government structure, and support the public activity of politicians. In addition, the republic is receiving funds for protecting and equipping the border, as well as for fighting drug trafficking. However, the amounts allotted show that this is nothing more than a surreptitious way to line the bureaucrats' pockets.

The cooling off in relations between Tajikistan and Russia suits Washington to a tee, although the U.S. is not ready to render large-scale aid to Dushanbe. On the other hand, the American administration, which values the republic strategically for its proximity to Afghanistan, is worried about the rapprochement between Dushanbe and Iran, as well as China's growing influence and economic presence in Tajikistan.

Development of Tajikistan's military cooperation with the U.S. consists of several aspects, one of which is creating a camp not far from Dushanbe for training Tajik servicemen, who until now have been undergoing training at Russian military centers.

Since denunciation of the contract between Kyrgyzstan and the U.S. on the Manas air base, Washington has been looking at the Aini aerodrome (it was modernized with the participation of specialists from the Indian Defense Ministry) as an alternative base for using Tajikistan's air and land transit corridors. In addition, the White House administration is still considering the possibility of a U.S. military operation against Iran.

So the U.S. will continue asking Tajikistan to provide it with exclusive rental rights to the Aini aerodrome or its joint use. At the same time, efforts will be made to resolve questions regarding the financing of a whole series of economic projects (in power engineering and transportation) in the republic, including those in which China is currently investing. It should be noted that the Tajik leadership is counting precisely on this aspect of possible aid from the U.S.

So until the Afghan campaign of the coalition forces is over, the Americans will continue to intensify their presence in Tajikistan too.

*In Lieu of a Conclusion*

The Obama Administration is largely pursuing the Central Asian policy begun by its predecessors, any adjustments, as a rule, being related to abrupt changes in the current situation.

The main components of this strategy are intensifying the U.S.'s influence on the CA countries (from the point of view of the Afghanistan problem), moderate support of nongovernmental organizations, use of symbolic rhetoric on human rights, support of pipeline projects that bypass Russia and Iran, activation of cooperation in the military sphere, and emphasis on cooperation with Kazakhstan beyond the bilateral framework.

Today, Barack Obama's policy in CA focuses on caution and taking Russia's interests into account. In the future, we should expect an increase in Washington's concern about the strengthening of China's and Iran's positions in the region. It is entirely possible that this factor in particular will bring the U.S. and Russia closer together.

Barack Obama's election as U.S. president was accompanied by loud statements on foreign policy issues, including the future of American policy in Afghanistan; the Great Game entered another qualitatively new round in its development. It was announced that Washington's foreign policy would focus on stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. This envisaged reversing the negative trends existing in this country and completing the building of a democratic society there. But no new real proposals for resolving the Afghan question were made.

So the U.S.'s "new" Afghan policy is based on the traditional strong-arm approach that consists of increasing the military contingent and intensifying combat action to deal the final blow that will defeat the Taliban movement.

One of the unpleasant surprises for the White House was the shift in accent in the Taliban's military strategy, which began to pay more attention to targeted action that interfered with the delivery of military shipments, food, and fuel and lubricants for the coalition forces in Afghanistan. The main roads that link Kabul with other regions of the country and Pakistan were slowly but surely blocked. The Pakistani route took the main brunt of the Taliban strike.

The fact that the Manas military base will probably be closed is in full keeping with Russia's interests. This event would help it to increase its influence in the CA region and resolve several problems existing in relations with the U.S. in its favor.

It can be presumed that one of the objectives for stepping up the decision to close the Manas military base immediately after Barack Obama's election as president was the desire to deprive the new head of the White House with the opportunity of continuing George Bush's policy regarding Russia.

From the viewpoint of long-term security and geopolitical leadership, closing the Manas base has both its pluses and minuses for Russia; this event will perceptibly increase its geopolitical opportunities, but will nevertheless create a direct threat to its security from Afghanistan. The thing is that the Taliban's stronger position openly challenges CA's stability, and the problems with delivering supplies to the Western forces may have a negative effect on their security, which will have negative consequences for the territories bordering on Afghanistan, including Russia.

With this in mind, Moscow offered its alternative for supplying the American troops in Afghanistan, which envisaged transit of strategic cargo. This will allow Russia to solve two strategic tasks. On the one hand, the American troops in Afghanistan will be provided with uninterrupted deliveries of supplies, while on the other (against the background of the unreliable routes through Pakistan), the Kremlin is essentially monopolizing the delivery of shipments to the NATO forces, which makes it possible for it to put pressure on the Americans.

The White House was unlikely to bargain with the Kremlin until Barack Obama reinforced his negotiating position. It appears that several alternatives exist at present for fortifying the U.S.'s position, whereby each of them presents quite a complicated task:

1. Scaling down the military confrontation in Afghanistan as soon as possible (which will make deploying large contingents in this country unnecessary);
2. Returning the Manas air base;
3. Finding an alternative route through Russia as quickly as possible.

All of Afghanistan's neighbors (apart from Turkmenistan) have the status of member or observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO); therefore use of this format for discussing not only the Afghan problem, but also developing the organization's independent position and policy is very acceptable.

But keeping in mind the events in XUAR in 2009, it is very likely that China, which is pursuing an anti-American policy, will put pressure on the SCO participants. Russia may steer a course toward increasing its influence in China (by strengthening economic cooperation and increasing aid to this country). This development of the situation could lead to greater cooperation between the U.S. and the Central Asian countries on international security, stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, joint protection of the borders, holding regular military exercises under the NATO aegis, and combating various global threats.

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