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Institutionalizing U.S.–Russian Cooperation in Central Eurasia

by Mikhail Troitskiy



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INTRODUCTION

By the mid-2000s, “Central Eurasia” had become a widely accepted term in analytical discourse and policy planning, denoting a geostrategic nexus between Russia, China, the Caucasus, the Middle East (Iran and Turkey), and South Asia (India and Pakistan). Now the time may be ripe to match this innovation in terminology with substantive political action that could help address many of Central Eurasia’s development and security issues.

For the purposes of this paper, Central Eurasia includes, in strict terms, the five post-Soviet countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and Afghanistan. It should be remembered, however, that in reality the set of political, economic, and security problems that originate in these six countries extend beyond their borders to the neighboring parts of Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, and even India. Although the following analysis is focused on the five post-Soviet states of Central Asia, it raises, by implication, a whole set of issues that bear directly on the security and economic development of many more countries across Eurasia—literally, from the Atlantic to Pacific coasts of the continent.

Several studies of the region have suggested that economic progress and security in the region are part of a vicious circle in which reform cannot progress without security, yet increasing security inhibits reform efforts. Unless the destabilizing risks of terrorism and extremism are reduced by “traditional” power instruments—such as military or police force and intelligence—progress along the path to democratic rule and market economies can

hardly be achieved.¹ Yet hardening security policies without due regard for the socio-economic roots of security problems can only lead a country into an impasse of authoritarian and inefficient rule. It is therefore crucial to pursue a “double-track” strategy of promoting socio-economic development while at the same time increasing both the internal and external security of Central Eurasian countries. One of the promising projects in this regard is to build an institutional structure that will involve some of the key outside players in improving the economic environment and enhance stability in the region, with the benefits extending far beyond Central Eurasia.

This paper starts off by outlining the interests of Russia, China and the United States as major outside players in the region. It continues with an analysis of the common U.S.–Russian agenda for Central Asia. I conclude with suggestions on ways to upgrade the existing institutional arrangements in Central Eurasia to a new level which could both benefit the five post-Soviet countries of Central Asia and become a long-term Russian–American cooperative project. In contrast to other areas of U.S.–Russian cooperation, such a project can be founded on a certain commonality of values between the two sides, thereby helping to transcend the limits of pragmatism that have been stymieing U.S.–Russian relations for the past decade and a half.

GREAT POWERS IN CENTRAL EURASIA: STAKES AND INTERESTS

The purpose of this study warrants only a limited overview of the interests and stakes that major external powers have in the region. The following section looks at the dilemmas Russia,

Mikhail Troitskiy is Associate Professor at MGIMO-University and Deputy Director of the Academic Educational Forum on International Relations in Moscow. He was a Fulbright-Kennan Research Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in August 2005–February 2006.

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China, and the United States face in their approaches to Central Eurasia.

Russia

The set of Russian interests in Central Eurasia appears to be the most intricate. These interests are distributed across the spectrum of Russian economic and political agents seeking to harness the power of the state to their own cause.

Russia's primary interest in the region is *energy*. Russia seeks to ensure the participation of its companies in the extraction of energy resources in the region and the transportation of oil and gas to international markets. Russian companies are investing in a whole variety of projects—from developing Kazakh oil and Uzbek gas fields to producing electricity in Tajikistan. Yet in the most lucrative cases, Russian companies face strong pressures from their foreign competitors as well as from governments of such countries as Kazakhstan who are cautious not to become too dependent on their powerful neighbor. For example, during the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Astana in July 2005, an agreement was signed between Rosneft and the Kazakh state oil company to develop the offshore Kurmangazy oil field in the Caspian Sea. The joint project, as currently planned, will be undertaken on production-sharing terms. It was “blessed” by the two governments, which also signed a memorandum on the strengthening of cooperation in the field of energy and electric power generation.² The Kazakh authorities, however, have remained less-than-forthcoming in allowing Russian companies to participate in the extraction of oil in the main Kazakh oil fields.

Oil transportation routes from Central Asia have been diversified over the past decade, thanks to consistent efforts by governments and private sector agents who sought to make downstream oil flows more independent from the Russian pipeline network. However, no such diversification occurred in the transportation of natural gas. Russia's flagship state-controlled energy company Gazprom has been successful in ensuring that the exports of Turkmen gas are brought to European markets through the Gazprom-owned pipeline network in Kazakhstan and Russia.

An important component of Russia's Central Asia policy is *protecting ethnic Russians* in the region. This goal has been receiving more attention since Moscow started to actively appeal to

Russian diasporas across the post-Soviet space in 2003–2004. While in the early 1990s the number of ethnic Russians living in Central Asian republics was estimated at around 20 million, by 2005 this number shrank to 6 million, or 12 percent of the Central Asian population.³ While applying pressure on the leaders of such states as Turkmenistan, who encroach on the rights of Russian citizens or Russian-speaking minorities, the Russian government seeks to employ ties with Russian diasporas to promote various interests of the Russian state in Central Asia.

Central Asia is a *source of cheap labor*, both for Russian private businesses and the public sector. Given the current demographic trends in Russia, Putin's government has recognized that the admission of greater numbers of foreign migrants will be necessary to keep the country's economy afloat. The Kremlin also understands that one of the few available incentives for a continued influx of foreign workers is the possibility of obtaining Russian citizenship in a reasonably quick and legally transparent way. For that purpose, some of the residency requirements for foreign nationals were eased in 2005, opening better prospects for them to become Russian citizens. Yet while trying to attract foreign workers, the problem Russia faces with migration from Central Asia and elsewhere is that it is almost impossible to regulate. Hence, one of Russia's main interests with regard to Central Asia is to develop institutions and procedures that could help control the number of migrants crossing into Russia from Central Asia and the ways they accommodate themselves on the Russian territory. The next step should be to make employment procedures and incomes earned by foreign migrants more transparent to the tax authorities. At the same time, adequate legal protection of Central Asian workers needs to be ensured unless authorities in Moscow and other large Russian cities are prepared to face a potential “Paris scenario” of mass protests by cohesive groups of disenfranchised migrants.

Large-scale migration and the challenge of drug trafficking require establishing more effective controls over the Russian-Kazakh border in a way that would not create insurmountable obstacles to labor migration and trans-border cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. While it is hardly possible to deploy Schengen-type control infrastructure and procedures on

the border between Russia and Kazakhstan (the longest continuous land border in the world), some relatively low-cost measures could be introduced to combat trafficking in drugs and other contraband goods and prevent potential spillovers of extremist activity from Central Asia into Russia. Among such measures are improvements in the system of screening of passengers, luggage, and cargo on the major railway crossings from Kazakhstan into Russia. At the same time, as a direct neighbor of the Central Asian region, Russia will never be able to completely fence off the trends originating in Central Asia. It is therefore in Russia's interest to retain influence over internal developments in the region by means of "soft" power—the ability to influence decision making in the states of the region in key spheres bearing directly on Russia's security and economic development.

The need for effective border controls and a transparent system for regulating migration are reinforced by the risks of separatist and extremist movements which could result in *regime changes* in Central Asia. Russian officials have clearly indicated that they would not like to see sudden changes of political elites in any of Central Asian states out of the fear that new authorities may display less willingness to heed Russian economic and security interests.

Russia's position resonates strongly with Chinese thinking on "color revolutions" though Beijing has not joined Moscow in openly criticizing "external intervention" in the affairs of the Central Asian states. Zhao Huasheng, a leading Chinese expert on Central Asia and Russia, pointed out that a change of president in a Central Asian state could lead to "considerable political and social turmoil and incur sharp turns in foreign policy." He emphasized that "political struggle in the former Soviet Republics often brings about serious upheaval and instability."⁴

Since the time when regime changes occurred in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, Russia has also indicated that it was concerned with American activity in the region. *Limiting U.S. influence in Central Asia* has apparently become one of Russia's core interests fully shared by the Chinese and reflected in the strategies of Russian—and Chinese—sponsored institutions.

While supporting China in matters related to the U.S.'s role in Central Asia, Russia has anxieties about the growth of Chinese economic

and political influence in the region. *The need to check China's Central Asian aspirations* may soon outweigh Russia's concerns about American penetration of the region. As a prominent observer of Russian-Chinese relations noted in early 2005, "[A]lthough Moscow and Beijing have been careful to underplay suggestions of strategic rivalry, incipient tensions have emerged even in today's benign bilateral climate—in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization where each looks to assume the leading role, and on the Korean question where Russia seeks to constrain—discreetly—Chinese assertiveness."⁵ He also indicated that "[T]he drawbacks to expanded economic cooperation with China are by no means negligible [for Russia – M.T.]. Oil and gas exports to China help drive the furious pace of modernization in that country, a modernization fundamental to its transformation into a global power. Similarly, the transfer of arms and weapons technology enhances Chinese military capabilities, with potential consequences not only for regional stability, but also for Russia's own long-term security (including the possibility that such hardware and know-how could one day be used against it)."⁶

China

China has a host of important interests in Central Asia. First and foremost, Central Asia is one of the main targets in *China's global quest for energy*. In 2004, China imported 100 million tons of crude oil—a three-fold increase since 1997. China imports around 50 percent of consumed energy resources with over 50 percent of oil imports coming from the Middle East and 22 percent from Africa.⁷ The 70-percent dependence on oil from volatile regions as well as the growing demand for energy to supply China's expanding economy make it vital for Beijing to tap Central Asian and Russian energy resources.

Chinese companies do not hesitate to place high bids for participation in oil and gas development projects in the region. In August 2005, China's largest oil producer, PetroChina, launched a successful \$4.18 billion bid to buy PetroKazakhstan—the second-largest producer of oil in Kazakhstan and the leader on the Kazakh refined products market. This was the first successful Chinese bid for a foreign oil company. In buying PetroKazakhstan, PetroChina outplayed India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation

(ONGC). Chinese companies have started to show themselves as formidable competitors in the oil industry. Once the government in Beijing approves a foreign takeover by a Chinese company, the Chinese side gets almost unlimited funds to outbid any competitor.⁸ According to some assessments, oil produced by Petro-Kazakhstan could help fill the pipeline from eastern Kazakhstan to China's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. This pipeline, linking the town of Alashankou in Xinjiang with Atasu in western Kazakhstan, was completed in late 2005.⁹

Beijing's "quiet" policy in Central Asia is focused on the *economic penetration of the region* by means of small trade and on ensuring that China gets a "fair" stake in Central Asian energy projects. Chinese analyst Zhao Huasheng indicated that the weakness of Central Asian economies after the collapse of the Soviet Union created ample opportunities for expanding exports of cheap Chinese goods to Central Asia. China now supplies most of the basic products used by people in Central Asia in their day-to-day life. Zhao concludes that "developing trade and other economic ties with Central Asian states has become an important channel for China's entry to the region."¹⁰

As part of its strategy, Beijing pushes forward a project to establish a free-trade zone including China and the Central Asian states. That would amount to opening up the Central Asian markets for Chinese goods which would then easily get to Russia—if necessary, by means of illegal trafficking.

The Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region, a potentially separatist province of China, borders on Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. This fact reinforces Beijing's concern with Central Asian political and socio-economic trends. Chinese officials and pundits maintain that Islamist fighters for Uighur independence and other extremists who are forced to flee China often find refuge in Central Asian countries.¹¹ To prevent the possible spillover of violence, it is important to China to make sure that Islamic extremist movements are kept at bay in the adjacent states of Central Asia.

China also has a clear interest in *preventing the United States from strengthening its foothold on China's western border* near Xinjiang. Zhao argues that the "double standards practiced by the US Administration in fighting terrorism across the

globe can provide inspiration to various separatist movements."¹² Concerned with a creeping "American encirclement" of China, Beijing supports Russia's opposition to U.S. military presence in Central Asia and is expanding its military cooperation with Russia (or at least is trying to create such an impression)—for example, by undertaking joint military maneuvers, such as Peace Mission 2005. The Russian- and Chinese-sponsored Shanghai Cooperation Organization, focused mainly on Central Asia, pledged, in July 2005, to stem terrorism, separatism, and extremism primarily "with their own forces"¹³ thus signaling to the U.S. that, even if Washington endorses the need to fight the "triple evil", American help in this cause will be unwelcome, especially if it entails intervening in other states' internal affairs.

It should be noted, however, that Peace Mission 2005 was carried out near and off the Pacific coasts of China and Russia and not anywhere close to Central Asia. This fact suggests that China's main strategic interests lie outside of Central Asia. China needs to show that it can enlist at least limited Russian support in its stance on Taiwan and human rights policies. By endorsing to a certain extent the thrust of Russia's approach to Central Asia, Beijing seeks to court Russia whose energy resources are much more attractive to China than Central Asia's and whose military technologies Beijing wants to tap. Russian concessions related to pipeline routes in Siberia as well as Russia's readiness to supply newer military technology are more valuable to China than any specific interest in Central Asia.

The United States

While Russia and China have Central Asia in their direct neighborhood, the United States enjoys a distant location and therefore immunity from almost all security problems emanating from the region. U.S. economic interests in the region are quite limited. America's stake in Central Asia is primarily geopolitical.

Four of the five post-Soviet Central Asian states present little interest to the U.S. in terms of trade and investment. The internal markets of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan are too narrow and the business opportunities these countries present to U.S. companies are too insignificant to become tangible factors in

Washington's policy toward the region. Only in Kazakhstan does the U.S. have a considerable stake in developing and marketing *Kazakhstani energy resources*. Yet as authors such as Julia Nanay have argued, it is geopolitics, and not U.S. energy security, that drives American interest in Kazakh (as well as Azeri) oil, because no meaningful diversification of oil supplies to the U.S. and other major consumers can be achieved through Caspian oil exports (Kazakhstan's oil output is around 1 million barrels per day which amounts to about 1 percent of world production).¹⁴ Turkmen gas could only become important to the United States if transportation routes through the Caucasus or Iran become available. For the time being, even the project for an Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline from Turkmenistan remains in the early stages of development.

The United States promotes the development of transportation routes for Central Asian hydrocarbons (mainly, Kazakhstani oil) that would bypass powerful neighbors of the region—primarily, Russia. However, the United States will soon need to decide which of the following it favors most: (1) pipelines from Kazakhstan that circumvent Russia, (2) any pipelines that bypass Iran, or (3) limiting oil exports from Central Asia/Caspian to the energy-thirsty China.¹⁵ It is impossible to promote all three options simultaneously because, to circumvent Russia, pipelines from Kazakhstan will need to either end in China or pass through Iran on the way to the Persian Gulf or Indian Ocean. If the U.S. decides that isolating Iran is the dominant imperative, Washington will not be able to limit supplies of Central Asia's energy resources to China or their transportation through Russian territory. Conversely, limiting exports to China requires ensuring more transportation routes for Central Asian oil and gas to supplement Russian downstream capacities. In this case it is difficult to see any alternatives to engaging Iran.

Virtually the only *means of U.S. economic engagement* with the four Central Asian states other than Kazakhstan is development aid, which is easily made conditional on the observance of certain principles by Central Asian authoritarian rulers, such as their human rights records. For example, in 2004 the amount of aid to Uzbekistan was cut by \$20 million because the U.S. Secretary of State sought to punish

Tashkent for its poor human rights record. There is indeed no economic interdependence between the United States and Central Asian countries, and Washington is able to use its economic engagement with Central Asian states as leverage over their foreign policies and in pursuit of other goals. For example, according to U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the United States “was going to provide some economic assistance to help with the lowering of trade barriers” among Central Asian states and between them and their eastern neighbors. This help was forthcoming because Washington favored “the regional development of this area [Central Asia] as having links to the growing economies of East Asia, of China, of our [U.S.] alliances in Japan and in Southeast Asia, of having strong internal links between them.”¹⁶

Drug trafficking through Central Asia does raise concern in the United States. Washington supports Tajik border guards and anti-drug forces. However, drug transit through Central Asia does not worry the United States to the same extent as Russia or China whose long borders with the region make them major destinations of Afghan and Central Asian drug traffickers. Russian defense and security officials have criticized the U.S. for “inadequate efforts” in combating drug transit and trade in Central Asia and have implied that Washington could be intentionally disregarding Russia's Central Asian drugs problem.

America's most important interests in Central Asia seem to be establishing *military outposts on China's western border* (especially near the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region) and *maintaining access to Afghanistan* in the form of “lily pads” (in Kyrgyzstan and, until recently, Uzbekistan) and land crossings (from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan). Washington can flexibly pursue these interests without becoming dependent on any one (or even two) of the Central Asian countries. Disengaging militarily from a Central Asian state can be done with only limited damage to the overall U.S. strategy in Central Asia. The evacuation of U.S. forces from the Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan in late 2005 is unlikely to be a major setback for Washington. According to some reports, the decision to downsize U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan was made prior to the Andijan events of May 2005 that caused a cool-down in relations between Washington and Tashkent.

As one of the regions where stability does not directly affect U.S. security interests, Central Asia (with the exception of Kazakhstan) has been included in the U.S. *democratization agenda* which was laid out by President George W. Bush in his Inaugural and State of the Union addresses in early 2005. Washington retains a considerably free hand in criticizing the internal policies of most Central Asian countries and raising concerns about the lack of democratic rule in Central Asia. Such criticism allows Washington to mobilize international support for American objectives far beyond the U.S. political arena.¹⁷

The relative importance of its energy partnership with Kazakhstan prevents Washington from pressuring Astana too much on the issues of democratic governance. The United States seeks to encourage exports of Kazakh hydrocarbons through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline—a transportation route launched in 2005 for Azeri and possibly Central Asian oil to bypass both the Russian territory and the Bosphorus/Dardanelles straits linking the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. Given its energy stakes, Washington prefers stability to the unpredictable pangs of accelerated democratization in Kazakhstan. As a consequence, only limited concerns have so far been raised by U.S. officials over Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev's crackdown on the opposition—admittedly moderate by Central Asian standards. Washington has not been an outspoken critic of the handling of the 2005 presidential campaign by President Nazarbaev who was pronounced the winner with a margin of 91 percent of the popular vote.

The difference in approaches to the prospects for democratization in Central Asia constitutes one of the major dividing factors for U.S. and Russian policies in the region. Reminiscences of the former U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Richard E. Hoagland are quite revealing: “[I]n November 2001, I instituted the first-ever U.S.-Russian consultations on Central Asia and the Caucasus. To the surprise of both sides, at the upper working level, we found much common ground—except on one absolute fundamental. Whereas I advocated for my government the necessity for political and economic reform in Central Asia, the Russian side advocated *status quo*—telling me that the United States was too naïve to understand the clan complexities of Central Asia.”¹⁸ Ambassador Hoagland went on

to address the sources of Russia's reluctance to agree to the need for more democracy in Central Asia: “I will be extremely blunt and say that the threat comes primarily from a very small minority in the Kremlin, sometimes referred to as the *siloviki*,¹⁹ who seem to be living in the past. And this threat comes in reaction—in the reactionary sense of the word—to the so-called *color revolutions* in Tbilisi, Kiev, and, to a lesser degree, in Bishkek. [I]t appears that the *siloviki* policy seeks, in neo-Cold War terms, to gain advantage in Central Asia, the supposed ex-Soviet sphere of influence, by feeding the Central Asian leaders the fear of *color revolutions*.”²⁰

Acknowledging the differences between Russian and U.S. approaches to the issue of democratic rule in Central Asia, it is, however, necessary to adequately account for common strategic objectives that both sides have in the region. These objectives can form the basis for institutional cooperative projects that could help create synergies essential for successful market reform and democratic transitions in Central Asia.

DEFINING A COMMON AGENDA FOR RUSSIA AND THE UNITED STATES IN CENTRAL EURASIA

It has become conventional wisdom that the United States and Russia share the goals of combating terrorist networks, preventing proliferation of dangerous materials originating in Central Eurasia, and containing religious extremism and drug transit in the region. U.S.-Russian cooperation in addressing these challenges has been extensively reviewed elsewhere and therefore will not be discussed at length in this paper.²¹ There are, however, several broader strategic considerations that, if properly understood in both Washington and Moscow, can extend their cooperative agenda beyond the mentioned areas.

Strategically, Russia and the U.S. appear to be natural partners in the “upper tier” of Eurasia, encompassing the Russian territory and the eight former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the South Caucasus. One only needs to consider the “axes in the making” along Eurasia's “lower tier”: China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. Both China and India are vying for a closer energy partnership with Iran. India is seeking to construct an Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline to satisfy its soaring need for energy. To supply oil from

the Caspian basin, India is considering the idea of a pipeline from Baku—a mirror image of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Such a project would inevitably involve Iran as a major contractor and stakeholder.²² In its turn, Pakistan is lamenting its lack of oil and gas resources, which makes an expansion of Pakistani ties with Iran very likely. These developments, along with continued instability in Afghanistan, do not bode well for the United States, which seeks to isolate Iran, or at least prevent a massive inflow of investment into the Iranian energy sector from such emerging economic giants as China and India. As a natural response, Washington pursues the policy of ensuring a reasonably-sized American presence in Eurasia's "upper tier". In a long-term perspective, it is too costly and therefore hardly expedient for the U.S. to indulge in policies that would antagonize rather than engage Russia in Central Asia and the Caucasus—provided, of course, that Russia is responsive. The hardest test for Russian-American cooperation in the "upper tier" is likely to remain Iran's nuclear ambitions, which are castigated by the U.S. and only mildly scolded by Russia.

The second strategic issue that could be addressed cooperatively by Russia and the United States in Central Eurasia is the U.S. concern with the tools and techniques China will be employing in its global quest for energy resources given its rapidly growing domestic demands.²³ Engaging China in predictable energy cooperation with a major energy consumer (the United States) and one of the largest producers of hydrocarbons in the world (Russia) could be most effective if Russia and the U.S. had a shared vision of the desired end-state in that process.

Several experts suggest that Washington should avoid raising Chinese concerns about the availability of energy resources by squeezing China out of oil and gas exploration and production in the most attractive regions such as the Middle East or the Caspian basin. They also recommend that the U.S. increase its military presence along the sea transportation routes linking China with African, Middle Eastern or Latin American oil suppliers. The same recommendation applies to Russia: "By harboring inclinations to 'contain' China's energy influence abroad and block their investment and infiltration in Central Asia, the actions of Russia and certain countries in the Persian Gulf have

had the counter-productive result of fueling geopolitical rivalry and prompting China to countermand U.S. economic sanctions. China has assisted countries with hostile or tense relations with the United States, including oil-exporting countries under unilateral U.S. economic trade sanctions such as Iran."²⁴ Hence, mutual understanding and a certain degree of trust is instrumental for both the U.S. and Russia in helping to alleviate China's grievances while at the same time controlling the pace and scope of Chinese penetration into Central Asian and Russian energy projects. It seems to be in both Russian and American interests to make sure that China does not become antagonized by "unfair treatment" but at the same time does not reap disproportionate benefits from establishing "special ties" with such energy exporters as Iran and Kazakhstan (and potentially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan). This could help to avoid all kinds of "geopolitical games" in Central Asia as well as the Middle East, Africa, or even Latin America where China was inclined to pursue cooperation with oil-exporting countries with poor relations with the U.S.

Finally, the United States, deeply immersed in the Iraqi turmoil, has recently sought to "subcontract" the most acute security dilemmas to its allies or groups of partner countries. Iran's nuclear aspirations have long been handled by the European Union's "troika", and in bargaining with North Korea, Washington did not object to putting China and South Korea in the front line of negotiations while retaining a decisive influence on outcomes. In a similar vein, the United States may at some point decide to go further down the path of downsizing its presence in Central Asia, both militarily and as a provider of assistance to the states of the region. In such a case, Russia should be able to assume at least part of the burden that the U.S. will be relieving itself of. As the Eurasia specialist Rajan Menon indicated:

At the end of the day, the United States is far removed from Central Asia and, if the antiterrorist war winds down, it will have few compelling reasons to remain in Central Asia. Russia, by contrast, will always have major interests in Central Asia, and the region's regimes are fated to deal with Moscow. Thus a Western policy in Central Asia that bypasses Russia, gives

it little more than a token role, or seeks to marginalize it, is shortsighted because it will make the states of Central Asia less, not more, secure. Even if Russia's current weakness limits its ability to compete with the United States and its allies for positive influence in Central Asia, Russia's ability to exert negative influence, to act as a spoiler, is considerable."²⁵

Acknowledging the roles of Russia and the U.S. in Central Asia, National Intelligence Council officer Angela Stent advocated even broader multilateral approaches: "[i]f the antiterrorism campaign is to succeed in the long run, there needs to be multilateral cooperation in Eurasia in order to achieve peace and stability. The United States and Russia will have to work with China and other neighbors as well as the EU, to establish a new framework for security in Central Asia and beyond."²⁶

Although plans to involve Russia, the United States, and China in a multilateral institution along with some Central Asian countries may now be too ambitious, it seems fully legitimate to discuss prospects for a Central Asian organization tying regional states to Moscow and Washington. Before outlining proposals and a rationale for such an organization, a brief overview of the activities of current institutions in Central Eurasia is in order.

Central Eurasia's economic and security institutions

Three types of institutions operate in post-Soviet Central Asia and adjacent regions. The first type includes Russian-led institutions: the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzES), on the economic side; and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, on the defense/military side. None of these organizations officially recognizes Russia's "leading role". However, Russia's geopolitical location as a link between Central Asia and other geographical areas, its political clout, and the size of its economy place Russia in the "driver's seat" of these organizations. Others in the car can influence the driver's choices, but in the end can hardly prevent him from moving in a direction he deems necessary or from crashing the car by accident, or on purpose.

The second institutional type is represented by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which emerged as a Chinese initiative, but is steered jointly by Beijing and Moscow, which strive at the same time to court Central Asian partners and harness their resources to the objectives China and Russia share in the region. Finally, NATO, led by the United States but very sensitive to European members' priorities, emerges as a third type of organization. It does not include any of the Central Asian countries, but cooperates with them through the Partnership for Peace and other outreach programs.

Created on the wreckage of the USSR, the *Commonwealth of Independent States* includes all five Central Asian countries and Russia. The CIS has not had a considerable impact on politics or the economy in Central Asia. However, as an institution that encompassed the remaining common interests among former Soviet republics, the CIS gave birth to two other institutions with more focused agendas and limited membership—the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community. Since its inception, the CIS has never been a cohesive group of states. Almost every member regarded it as a fallback option to resort to if other cooperative projects they sought to join failed to deliver expected results. The CIS' existential crisis deepened after Russia openly acknowledged that the Commonwealth was no more than a "means of civilized divorce"²⁷ and started treating it as a "discussion club" to address mutual concerns and the "lowest common denominator" of its members' interests.²⁸

The Eurasian Economic Community (EvrAzES) was established in 2000 as a manifestation of a certain commonality of economic interests among Russia, Belarus, and three Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. By creating EvrAzES, its parties institutionalized the Customs Union Treaty initially signed by Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in 1995. In 1996, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan signed on to the Treaty. As a major success, EvrAzES ensured the accession of Uzbekistan in October 2005 after EvrAzES was merged with the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO). Uzbekistan's tilt towards EvrAzES happened as a consequence of a showdown in Tashkent's relations with the West in the aftermath of the Andijan events in May 2005.

EvrAzES was set up to promote the customs union and create a “single economic space” among its members. Achievement of the latter goal was announced in 2003. Yet many barriers to a single economic space in the classical sense of the word (free movement of goods, services, capital, and the labor force) still exist even within EvrAzES, while numerous intergovernmental councils and committees have so far failed to accomplish any significant breakthroughs in terms of liberalizing economic interactions among the Community members.²⁹ On the whole, as of the middle of the decade, EvrAzES has not become a vehicle for managing economic and political relations in Central Asia.

Much more tangible results were achieved in the political-military sphere by the *Collective Security Treaty Organization*. Its precursor—the Collective Security Treaty was signed in May 1992 by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In 1994, it was joined by Azerbaijan and Georgia. The document became known as the Tashkent Treaty. The document stipulated the principle of an “attack against one member state being tantamount to an attack against all members.” However, the Treaty did not provide for ways of conflict resolution among member states themselves. This was one of the main reasons why Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan did not renew their commitments to the Treaty in 1999. Since then, the document again assumed the name of Collective Security Treaty. In October 2002, the six “faithful” parties agreed on a charter for a Collective Security Treaty Organization which came into existence in May 2003. It has a secretariat, joint military staff, and collective rapid deployment forces in Central Asia. Russia and the three Central Asian members of CSTO committed to contribute one battalion each to this 1,500-strong contingent.

In late 2005, Uzbekistan, embattled by the West, demonstrated interest in rejoining CSTO. This was de facto accomplished by the Treaty on Alliance Relationship between Russia and Uzbekistan signed in November 2005. Both sides undertook to provide military assistance in case of an attack against one of them.³⁰ Uzbekistan found itself in a defense alliance with Russia, which simultaneously remains the “core state” in the CSTO.

Russia’s main objectives within CSTO include retaining influence over other members’ security policies and keeping open the option of addressing security challenges that Russia deems important, in cooperation with its Central Asian partners. Washington analyst Ariel Cohen outlined Russia’s current tactical priorities as the “joint control of borders and air space; joint rapid reaction task forces to combat terrorism; Russian bases in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Armenia; and no foreign bases.”³¹ However, according to CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, the Organization is not so much concerned with traditional security threats. He tried to downplay these threats stating that while he sees NATO “as a military-political bloc with the emphasis...on the military component,” CSTO is primarily focused on the “new issues in security.” These issues, according to Bordyuzha, include “drug trafficking, terrorism, illegal migration and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.” Discussing CSTO tasks on Russian television in December 2005, Bordyuzha emphasized that “whole sectors of the nation are dying from drugs and this is evidently where the efforts of structures like CSTO need to be focused at present.”³²

It is the non-traditional security threats that CSTO proposes to place at the center of the CSTO-NATO cooperation agenda. In December 2005, the CSTO Secretary-General suggested, referring to NATO and CSTO, that “the aims of both organizations, though of different weight, are close in essence, and those are countering contemporary challenges and security threats: terrorism, drug trafficking and others.” Bordyuzha added that CSTO was trying to convince NATO to start official relations and stated his preference “for mutual cooperation, in particular, in countering drug trafficking from Afghanistan.”³³ Calls on NATO for cooperation in anti-drug trafficking measures in Central Eurasia were simultaneously made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov at a meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.³⁴

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization started off in 1996 as the Shanghai Five—a grouping which included Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In such a forum, China primarily sought to address border issues with its Central Asian neighbors. Russia was a

major stakeholder in all discussions pertaining to China's borders with Central Asian states and therefore had to be involved in the talks. The Shanghai Five also focused on confidence-building measures—a matter of concern to Central Asian states facing the quiet but assertive China on their eastern borders. Between 1997 and 2001 the grouping substantially expanded its initial agenda. In addition to annual summits, the Shanghai Five conducted meetings of high government officials responsible for defense, internal security, trade, economic development, transportation, etc. In June 2001, the Shanghai Five, joined by Uzbekistan, signed the Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, thereby following the path of placing a rather loose institution on a firmer organizational footing. In July 2002, SCO states adopted the Charter of the Organization.³⁵ The Charter stipulated goals of both the intensification of economic ties and cooperation in the field of security. The latter goal focuses on fighting the “triple evil” of “terrorism, separatism, and extremism.”

Such a formula, and, especially, its interpretation by SCO's leading states, was not fully in line with the American approach to regional development in Central Asia. Beijing used it to stress the existence of a network connection between radical elements operating in China and those in other countries of Central Eurasia. These elements purportedly seek to undermine the territorial integrity of China (primarily in the Xinjiang Region) by employing, among other means, acts of terror. Giving vague or no definitions to “terrorism,” “separatism,” or “extremism,” SCO countries, at their 2005 summit, named those “threats to the territorial integrity and security of SCO members as well as to their political, economic and social stability.”³⁶ Such interpretation gave SCO leaders more than enough freedom to consider any large-scale social discontent movement a manifestation of “extremism” and seek cooperation in countering the protests from SCO partner-states.

Washington, in its turn, was placing stronger emphasis on the need for democratic rule in the region. U.S. officials argued, most unequivocally before the September 11th attacks, that the lack of opportunities for democratic self-expression was in fact driving opposition in Central Asian states underground and increasing popular support for the cause of radical Islamists.

Friction between U.S. policy in Central Asia and the SCO vision of the region surfaced in summer 2005. On the heels of the showdown in U.S.-Uzbek relations triggered by the Andijan events of May 2005, SCO leaders issued a declaration that called for members of the U.S.-led Anti-Terror Coalition to openly define the time frame for keeping their military contingents on the territories of SCO states.³⁷ This call primarily referred to the Coalition airbases outside of Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and Tashkent, Uzbekistan.

Prior to and during the SCO summit of July 2005, Russian and Chinese leaders floated ideas about involving other Asian powers, such as India, Pakistan, or even Iran, in active cooperation with the SCO or even inviting them to join the Organization. Its leaders cited the fact that, should India and Pakistan join the SCO, the Organization will represent over half of the world's population.

Soon after the SCO raised its voice against the open-ended U.S. military presence in Central Asia, China and Russia—the two co-leaders of the organization—held joint military maneuvers. The exercises, codenamed Peace Mission 2005, were conducted on and off the Pacific coasts of China and Russia. The maneuvers were formally undertaken within the framework of the SCO and followed earlier counterterrorism exercises that involved all six SCO states in 2002–2004.³⁸ The new momentum in Russian-Chinese cooperation along with the diminishing American influence in Central Asia raised concerns in Washington. Some U.S. analysts recommended that the U.S. administration take measures to check the “rising Russia-China entente.” One of the proposed steps was to “secure observer status for the United States in the SCO.”³⁹

In its turn, Russia tried to dispel Western fears of a full-fledged Moscow-Beijing military alliance on the basis of SCO. Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the Russian State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee, called such concerns “exaggerated and an invention.” He opined that “the element of military cooperation and mutual security guarantees was initially inherent” in SCO's activities. Kosachev further stressed that “collective security cooperation is likely to develop further within the framework of the SCO, but there are no grounds to say that this is being done against the U.S. or NATO.”⁴⁰ Overall, Russian officials and influential pundits expend-

ed much effort to convince the United States and its European allies that the anti-drug and anti-terrorism priorities⁴¹ of both SCO and CSTO were in no way directed against U.S. or NATO interests. It is clear, however, that the expanding scope of SCO responsibilities testifies to Russia's bet on closer cooperation with China in the wake of "colored revolutions" that undermined Russian influence in the post-Soviet space. By early 2006, courting China became one of the means employed by Russian policymakers to limit the damage from the U.S.-Russian disagreement on the future of post-Soviet states. Whether Russia's "China bet" needs hedging is a serious question that will require an unambiguous answer by the Russian leadership in the foreseeable future.⁴²

NATO came to play a bigger role in Central Asia after the launch of the anti-Taliban operation in Afghanistan in October 2001. Formally, since 1991, all five Central Asian countries have cooperated with the Alliance through the North-Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), later renamed Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Program by signing a Framework Document in 1994. Tajikistan followed suit in February 2002. However, for most of the 1990s and early 2000s NATO was focused on integrating Central and Eastern European candidates. Apart from discussions within EAPC, little substantive effort was undertaken to step up cooperation with Central Asian states.

The strategic significance of Central Asia increased dramatically after the "War on Terror" campaign was launched in response to the September 11th attacks on the United States. With Moscow's blessing, Central Asian countries provided the U.S.-led Anti-Terror Coalition with overflight rights and sites to deploy two airbases which greatly facilitated access to the battleground in Afghanistan. A few months after the campaign started, the U.S. administration called on NATO to substantively expand cooperation with Central Asian countries.⁴³ This move came as a logical continuation of NATO's eastern enlargement agenda that was mostly accomplished by the Alliance's summit in Prague (October 2002), where seven countries of Central and Eastern Europe received formal invitations to join NATO.

In its Istanbul Summit Communiqué of June 2004, NATO referred to Central Asia and the Caucasus as "strategically important regions." At Istanbul, NATO also decided to appoint a Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia and send a liaison officer to each of the two regions. Robert Simmons, NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, pays regular visits to both regions (with a special focus on the Caucasus) in order to keep abreast of regional trends and woo support in Central Asian capitals for various forms of engagement with NATO. By the end of 2005, Kazakhstan turned out to be NATO's most advanced Central Asian partner. In autumn 2005, Astana confirmed its intention to sign an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO—an undisclosed document outlining a substantive agenda for cooperation between the two signatories. For the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the signing of an IPAP was usually one of the last milestones on the way to receiving a formal invitation to the Alliance.

Overall, since the mid-1990s, Central Asian countries benefited substantially from NATO assistance, which came in the form of security and border forces training by NATO instructors and engagement in maneuvers alongside NATO contingents. NATO's outreach agenda in Central Asia has been for the most part bilateral. Brussels preferred giving each partner country an opportunity to determine how far it wanted cooperation to extend. This was done to prevent the possibility of individual states obstructing multilateral programs in the region. NATO showed reluctance to engage into multilateral cooperation with CSTO, which, as some analysts feared, could "give Moscow considerably more say over the Atlantic alliance's activities in the region, effectively forestalling the ability of regional leaders to forge independent relationships with Brussels."⁴⁴

NATO's interest in Central Asia is likely to grow in the future due to a number of factors. The first is the rising threat of drug transit from Afghanistan across Russia or the Caucasus into Western Europe or even the United States. Secondly, the downsizing of the U.S. contingent in Afghanistan will reinforce the role of NATO as an institution through which other allied powers will come to play a greater role in the International Stabilization Assistance Force

(ISAF) deployed in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the Taliban's defeat. In consequence, the need for Central Asian "lily pads" will become stronger for the U.S. (and NATO) allies that are involved in conflict management and nation-building in Afghanistan. Finally, although Washington has since 2001 regarded NATO as little more than a multilateral facilitator for a number of secondary U.S. initiatives, the challenges that the United States and its allies are currently facing in Central Asia provide opportunities for enhancing the cohesiveness of NATO and reinforcing the Alliance's transforming sense of mission. Part of that mission, according to top U.S. officials, includes the ambitious task of assisting democratization in the Central Asian states.⁴⁵

PROSPECTS FOR INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA

Notwithstanding reservations on the part of both NATO and CSTO about mutual cooperation in Central Asia, at least two interrelated areas can be clearly identified where the two blocs could achieve tangible results by pooling their resources. These areas include fighting drug trafficking and stemming cross-border extremist activities in the region.

So far, Moscow and Washington have successfully carried out joint terrorist threat assessments in Central Eurasia with a special focus on possible spillovers of instability from Afghanistan. In 2005, the Russian side made several attempts to engage NATO on the "drug front". Moscow was trying to attract NATO's attention to the linkages between drug trafficking and extremism in Central Asia. After meeting NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in June 2005, President Putin opined that Russia and NATO should cooperate in combating the drug trade in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov added that, using the money raised in the drug trade, "on the territory of Afghanistan and bordering Pakistani regions, terrorists are being trained by former Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan members, former Taliban and by people [with experience] in carrying out terrorist attacks in the Russian Federation." While Putin suggested that NATO and Russia undertake "a pilot project to train drug enforcement officers in Afghanistan and Central Asia," Lavrov confirmed Moscow's readi-

ness "to work with NATO in the framework of our joint plan for fighting against international terrorism" and "to arrange relations between NATO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization."⁴⁶

At that point, Russian suggestions received only a lukewarm response from NATO. Yet in the wake of a Sino-Russian rapprochement in autumn 2005, voices were raised in Washington in favor of stepping up bilateral (U.S.-Russia) and multilateral (NATO-CSTO) cooperation in Central Asia. Conservative analysts Ariel Cohen and John Tkacik noted that "opposing Islamist terrorism and militancy is a joint interest for all powers involved in the area." They suggested that

the U.S. Department of State and the intelligence community should launch joint working groups and task forces to collect intelligence on, intercept the communications of, and neutralize radical Islamist organizations and drug trafficking operations. This can be accomplished under the umbrella of the U.S.-Russia Anti-Terrorism Working Group, co-chaired by R. Nicholas Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Sergei Kislyak, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia.⁴⁷

Rajan Menon recommended the creation of "multilateral (NATO-Russia-Central Asia) task forces...to fashion joint policies and institutional (rather than intermittent and ad hoc) responses to terrorism; the drug trade; organized crime; the security of energy installations; and smuggling involving the raw materials, expertise, or parts needed to make weapons of mass destruction." He further argued for a full-fledged "multilateral (NATO-Russia-Central Asia) organization...to promote the coordination of intelligence and the training of forces geared toward combating terrorism, [so that] joint operations should become a routine practice."⁴⁸

However, while NATO is cautious to avoid dependence on CSTO in contacts with individual Central Asian capitals, Russia is equally unprepared to embrace certain types of institution-building projects. This particularly concerns proposals, which call for an intraregional organization that would unite the states of (Greater) Central Asia in withstanding pressure by "expansionist powers" (read: Russia and

China). Making such proposals, the United States reserves for itself the role of a promoter of democracy, economic reform, and human rights, that is, of a “guru” exercising considerable influence short of direct involvement in the regional states’ internal affairs. Russian policymakers tend to view such proposals as an attempt to drive wedges between Moscow and Central Asian states, which are often advised by the West to be independent from anything but its own “positive influence” and cooperate regionally to reduce their allegedly high dependence on Russia in such issues as military cooperation and transportation routes for Central Asian energy resources. An illuminating example of such a project is S. Frederick Starr’s idea of a “Greater Central Asia Partnership” publicized in spring 2005.⁴⁹ For all its indisputably original and promising nature, this proposal only raised suspicion in Russia about the real implications of a U.S.-sponsored regional trade and political bloc in Central Asia.

Notwithstanding all prospects for a reluctant yet progressing partnership between NATO and CSTO in Central Asia, one may argue that the existing security and economic development institutions in Central Eurasia simply do not have enough resources to pool for their collaboration to become effective. “Partial institutionalization,” whereby each powerful player seeks to nurture its “own” organization or simply move along the bilateral path, also breeds unhealthy competition among outside powers and provides smaller states with opportunities to play off external powers against each other. At the same time, no regional or outside player is able to attain its goals relying only on its own resources or those of the institution it sponsors.

Powerful as it may seem at first glance, SCO is likely to be inhibited by the rising competition for leadership between Russia and China. At the same time, Moscow has achieved maximum institutional engagement with Beijing through SCO. It may now be useful for Russia to hedge its bets by institutionalizing relations in Central Asia with the United States and NATO. An institutional project in Central Eurasia, involving Russia/CSTO and the U.S./NATO, could also add substance to the flagging U.S.-Russian partnership in other areas. It has been acknowledged that while Russia seeks to preserve the favorable status quo in Central Asia,

the United States and NATO are not opposed to changes in the region’s political regimes and their foreign policy priorities. However, as long as certain shifts appear unavoidable in the view of the aging leadership in three countries of the region, a CSTO/NATO institution that includes at least some Central Asian states could help to avoid shocks and unpleasant surprises in the course of this transition.

A CASE FOR A CENTRAL EURASIAN SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

A promising multilateral design for Central Asia could take the form of an organization involving Russia, the United States, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan plus representatives of NATO and CSTO. The two non-Central Asian CSTO members—Armenia and Belarus—would have good reasons to agree to such design as they will obtain a say on Central Asian affairs through their membership in CSTO. I will call the proposed institution a “Central Eurasian Security and Development Organization” (CESEDO). This name underscores the fact that the institution’s agenda will likely extend geographically beyond the five Central Asian republics. CESEDO would not need to become either a collective security arrangement or an economic union, but it could have a number of valuable functions:

1. *Facilitating information exchange and serving as a forum for consultation on security concerns in the region.* Such a forum could prove useful in bridging the gaps in perceptions of the major security trends affecting Central Eurasia. For example, as several U.S. analysts have suggested, Russian and U.S. officials and experts have diverging general approaches to non-proliferation. Russia does not view non-proliferation as a top national security concern, considering it primarily a headache for the United States, whose international conduct has alienated many potential American allies in non-proliferation. The threat from proliferation of WMD to such states as Iran or North Korea is not perceived as acutely in Moscow as in Washington.⁵⁰ However, the risks associated with loose WMD materials in Central Asia can be as significant for Russia as they are for the West. Hence, the non-proliferation track at CESEDO may become more meaningful than usual U.S.-Russian exchanges on WMD programs of Iran, North Korea or Pakistan.

2. *Training and deploying a joint rapid reaction contingent to combat extremists and possibly protect energy transportation infrastructure.* For a start, the CSTO anti-terrorist center⁵¹ could be expanded to involve U.S./NATO representatives into cooperation beyond information exchange. Alternatively, if opening up CSTO structures to NATO proves impossible due to national security considerations, CESEDO may decide to establish its own institutions of security policy, including a planning unit and a permanent military staff. This could, however, make CSTO institutions redundant or too costly to maintain in parallel to the “twin” CESEDO structures. Every effort should therefore be made to avoid duplication but, at the same time, endow CESEDO security bodies with meaningful tasks.

3. *Serving as a channel for supplying development aid and security assistance.* CESEDO could set up mechanisms to monitor the need for development aid and security assistance to Central Asian countries. Short of lending functions, CESEDO could draft reports on the state of Central Asian economies and investment needed to implement critical infrastructural projects. At the same time, the Organization could be in a position to provide assistance to security and border forces as well as customs services that are involved in addressing security challenges common to CESEDO members. CESEDO would create unprecedented opportunities for joint programs of assistance to Central Asian security forces by Russia and the NATO countries. However, before any programs in this field can be started, all the parties involved will need to make sure that the security assistance will not be diverted by the recipient states for the purposes of “dealing with” opposition movements.

4. *Conducting dialogue on democracy and development in Central Asia.* Discussion of the democratic rule issues should become part of the CESEDO mission. This is especially important if effective channels for supplying security assistance are to be created within the Organization. However, CESEDO’s human rights agenda will need to be somewhat constrained to ensure that Central Asian states will be accepting of the Organization. In addition to the Central Asian countries, Russia might also face criticism for its alleged lack of democratic rule, but it appears that Moscow has already developed a whole set of arguments to parry such criticism. Hence, if

democracy concerns are to be given a place on the CESEDO agenda, it will be necessary to (a) package them with the “carrot” of development aid for Central Asian states and (b) provide for only an advisory role of the Organization with respect to human rights and freedoms, and make sure that this agenda is only reviewed in the context of security and the fight against extremism.

5. *Expanding the energy dialogue.* The Organization could make a contribution to enhancing the security of the Central Asian oil transportation network. This is indeed the most far-reaching and therefore ambitious task for CESEDO. However, even if it falls short of facilitating joint measures to physically protect the oil infrastructure, any multilateral dialogue on regional and trans-regional energy supply routes and amounts of exported hydrocarbons could help to bridge the gaps in approaches to energy security by Russia, the United States, and major Central Asian oil and gas exporters.

All the outlined objectives naturally raise the question: is such a project anything more than wishful thinking? An answer requires examining the rationales of all the parties in underwriting a CESEDO-like project.

Russia has several good reasons to become one of the founders of such an organization. First, Russia lacks resources to successfully address the whole variety of regional challenges, including security and economic development. Moscow needs Washington to contribute to stemming proliferation of dangerous materials and fighting drug trafficking. The latter problem is already being addressed cooperatively in Tajikistan, where Russia and the U.S. provide assistance to Tajik anti-drug bodies, including border guards.

Secondly, Russia may face difficult dilemmas if Andijan-type scenarios are repeated in the presence of such documents as the Russian-Uzbek Alliance Treaty of November 2005. Should Russia unconditionally support authorities in a Central Asian state if they decide to crack down violently on mass protest movements? (The Treaty envisages consultations between Moscow and Tashkent if an internal issue of concern arises in Uzbekistan.) An opinion voiced by a multilateral institution may facilitate decision making for Russia in such a case.

Thirdly, in the aftermath of the Andijan events, Russia may also want to institutionalize the rise in its influence in Central Asia. Legitimizing its

friendly ties with less-than-democratic regimes in the region could become one of Russia's objectives in developing institutional arrangements on the basis of cooperation between NATO and CSTO. This would hardly undermine Russia's bilateral policies in the region once its Central Asian counterparts join the same institutions. At the same time, Central Asian members, such as Kazakhstan, may appreciate CESEDO as a way to balance political ties with Russia against those with NATO and the U.S.

Institutionalizing a U.S.-Russian energy partnership could become a fourth reason for Russia to seriously consider establishing a CESEDO-like institution. Both the United States and Russia are seeking to put their emerging energy partnership on a more solid basis than contracts between state-owned or private oil companies. Whereas links limited to the private sector may be more suitable for the United States given that virtually all oil and natural gas companies in the U.S. are privately owned, the Russian government sees heavy state involvement in extraction and, especially, transportation of hydrocarbons as an essential part of Russia's economic development strategy. Any institutionalized Russian-American energy partnership will require not only oversight, but constant participation of the Russian authorities, including high political leadership. To match Russia's patterns of energy sector management, the U.S. government may find it useful to maintain a permanent contact on energy issues with its Russian counterpart through CESEDO.

Within CESEDO, Moscow can involve Central Asian stakeholders in discussions with Washington about the American agenda of "diversification of energy supplies from Eurasia" which causes concerns in Russia. In its turn, the U.S. can find CESEDO's multilateral format helpful in effectively raising questions about Russia's use of energy supplies as a means of political pressure on its neighbors.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that so far neither Russia nor China has been enthusiastic about American involvement in any institutions in Central Eurasia. For that position, Russia has received much criticism from Western officials and commentators:

[B]oth China and Russia seek [in Northeast Asia] to use formal multilateralism as a cover by which to pursue a

strategy of leveraging regional associations and states against American policy and power. [...] Through this strategy of leveraging regional blocs against Washington, they hope not only to solidify spheres of influence in vital areas but also to force Washington to come to terms with them both regionally and globally and act only with their consent or prior consultation."⁵²

CESEDO prospects will therefore strongly depend on Russia's willingness to seriously consider the benefits it can reap from multilateral cooperation in Central Asia with the involvement of Moscow's key Western partners.

Central Asian states appear to have a number of serious reasons to at least examine the CESEDO option. First, Central Asian governments choosing to participate in the Organization will get ample opportunities to discuss with the United States the "stability versus democracy" dilemma as applied to Central Asian circumstances. Such states as Uzbekistan or Tajikistan will be able to present to U.S. officials evidence of the involvement of radical Islamists in domestic conflicts. This evidence can then be evaluated by third parties, such as Russia or NATO, and the Organization as a whole can issue a statement on the internal situation in a particular state, should circumstances require such a ruling. As long as the European culture of yielding to concerns of multilateral bodies does not exist in Central Asia, these rulings will not bring about implications comparable in significance to, for example, the ones issued by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. However, establishing a multilateral institution in Central Asia could be the first step toward closer intraregional cooperation and, as a consequence, better receptiveness of states in the region to particular concerns of their neighbors—whether they are related to foreign or domestic policies of a particular country.

Secondly, CESEDO could develop mechanisms to advise Central Asian countries on both domestic and external problems (they may need assistance in cases of extremist uprisings or threats to domestic stability originating in other states, such as Afghanistan) and, if the possibility arises, monitor elections or other crucial events in Central Asian states. The proposed

institution will not provide NATO-style security guarantees; its charter may only contain vague commitments to democratic rule by CESEDO members. At the same time, the charter could commit its signatories to peaceful resolution of intraregional disputes and good neighborly relations. It can also stipulate the stability of borders in the region—a very important provision for such countries as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are facing the possibility of negotiations with China about further “territorial adjustments”.

The main rationale *the United States* may find for joining CESEDO would be to push forward the “strategy of integration”, that is, of expanding partnerships with important players across the globe and avoiding unnecessarily unilateral policies that tend to antagonize prospective American partners.⁵³ The United States may embrace the institutional option in Central Asia because America’s will to become entangled in military operations or nation-building endeavors is likely to decrease in the wake of the impending gradual withdrawal from Iraq. At the same time, Washington may start to look for ways to get involved in non-binding yet meaningful regional arrangements that could provide channels for projecting American influence, or at least opinion, on the situation in a particular region. America’s interest in regional arrangements may further increase in light of its disappointment with comprehensive international bodies, such as the UN. The need to find a middle path between unilateral intervention and submitting its power to world-wide organizations could raise U.S. interest in regional institution-building—limited in geographical scope yet sufficiently broad in agenda.

The United States may find it expedient to pursue multilateralism in Central Asia outside of NATO simply because the Atlantic alliance cannot offer any Central Asian state the possibility of membership, or any other strong incentive for cooperation, in the foreseeable future. NATO’s Partnership for Peace program creates even less cohesion among its members than any of the Russia—or China—led institutions in the region. For the time being, the United States can only make use of such multilateral frameworks (largely rhetorical in this case) as the Anti-Terrorist Coalition operating in Afghanistan—the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan is said to belong to the

Coalition. All other ties with Central Asian states are carried out by Washington on a bilateral basis. That implies the risk of unpleasant surprises for the U.S. from each individual actor in the region, just as occurred with Uzbekistan in the wake of the Andijan events of May 2005. An institutional arrangement with American participation in Central Asia could allow the United States to cautiously promote its “democratic reform” agenda while avoiding the risk of an abrupt reaction or a reversal of foreign policy course by any “target state”. Even if some Central Asian governments strongly dislike American criticism, they will be less inclined to respond harshly and unproductively when such criticism comes from a multilateral institution in a more impersonal form.

If properly managed, a comprehensive political/security/economic institution in Central Asia could be unique in at least two respects. The first will be its composition. Never before have the United States and Russia been together as part of a regional security organization. While not formally extending defense guarantees to CESEDO Central Asian members, the U.S. and Russia could nevertheless help to enhance regional security by mediating intraregional conflicts and contributing to the struggle against specific security challenges in the region. In their turn, the Central Asian members would be insured against domination by any single great power, including not only the United States and Russia, but China as well. Secondly, the agenda of a CESEDO-type institution could encompass an unprecedented range of issues, from security to energy supplies to development. This would require strong consensus-building skills and long-term efforts to build mutual trust both among CESEDO member states and, especially, between the two “big” players—the United States and Russia. For their part, the latter two actors will need to resist the temptation to engage in “great power politics” in Central Asia—something that the region has been trying to move away from since its independence.

CONCLUSION

Both Moscow and Washington seem to be developing an understanding of the need for cooperation in Central Eurasia, even if their differences in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe remain more complex. According to A. Elizabeth Jones, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs,

The United States recognizes that Russia has legitimate interests in Eurasia based on geography, economics and history. We support good relations between Russia and its neighbors, and we have no desire to compete with Russia in a modern version of the “Great Game”. Indeed, we hope to find ways to cooperate in addressing some of the problems of the region. But we also look to Russia to respect the sovereignty and independence of the other former Soviet states.⁵⁴

Russian officials have reciprocated with similar statements displaying willingness to work together with the United States in the post-Soviet space under certain conditions.

Supplementing the friendly rhetoric with concrete cooperative institutional projects in Central Eurasia requires a reassessment of interests by all the parties involved. At the moment, it appears that both Russia and the United States are failing to fully acknowledge the commonality of their strategic goals and falling back on parochial pressures by various interest groups in their countries. These pressures have not only pitted Russia and the U.S. against each other in the post-Soviet space, but also spoiled the general atmosphere in bilateral relations with immediate implications for many areas of mutual concern.

In order to bridge the gap in strategic thinking, Russia will need to disassociate parochial interests and set forth a clear strategy in relations with post-Soviet states. This strategy should avoid the traps of over-militarization or frequent resorting to the “energy supplies weapon”. Moscow need not create bugbears out of small and rather vulnerable neighbors with subsequent fixation on the imagined damage these states can cause Russia. Outside of Russia, such moves are usually interpreted as “bullying the weak” and result in damaging Russia’s relations with actors far more important for Moscow than some of its immediate neighbors.

Reaching out to Central Asian countries in cooperation with Russia also requires rethinking a number of tenets of the U.S. strategy. Washington does not need to aim at limiting the influence of every other actor, including Moscow, in the post-Soviet space. Russia is a natural partner for most of its neighbors. For them, quarreling with Moscow is fraught with

serious economic and socio-political risks. Russia supplies them with energy or transports their hydrocarbons, provides investment, constitutes a vast market for consumer goods and employs millions of citizens from almost all the post-Soviet states. The cash that migrant workers send home from Russia accounts for large shares of the sending countries’ GDPs. Russia also provides security to post-Soviet states in the form of military equipment, training, and joint exercises. The Russian language and culture continue to play a significant role in the socio-economic development of most post-Soviet countries. Motivated youths from Central Asian, trans-Caucasian, and even East European states still view Russia as source of advanced education.

The United States and Russia can “agree to disagree” on some of their approaches to relations with Central Asian countries. Yet these disagreements may be addressed more productively in the framework of institutions where Russia, the United States, and interested Central Asian countries share membership. It may take much “out of the box” thinking to launch such institutions. It should be remembered, however, that repairing or continuously maintaining any partnership requires a commitment to constant innovation on both sides.

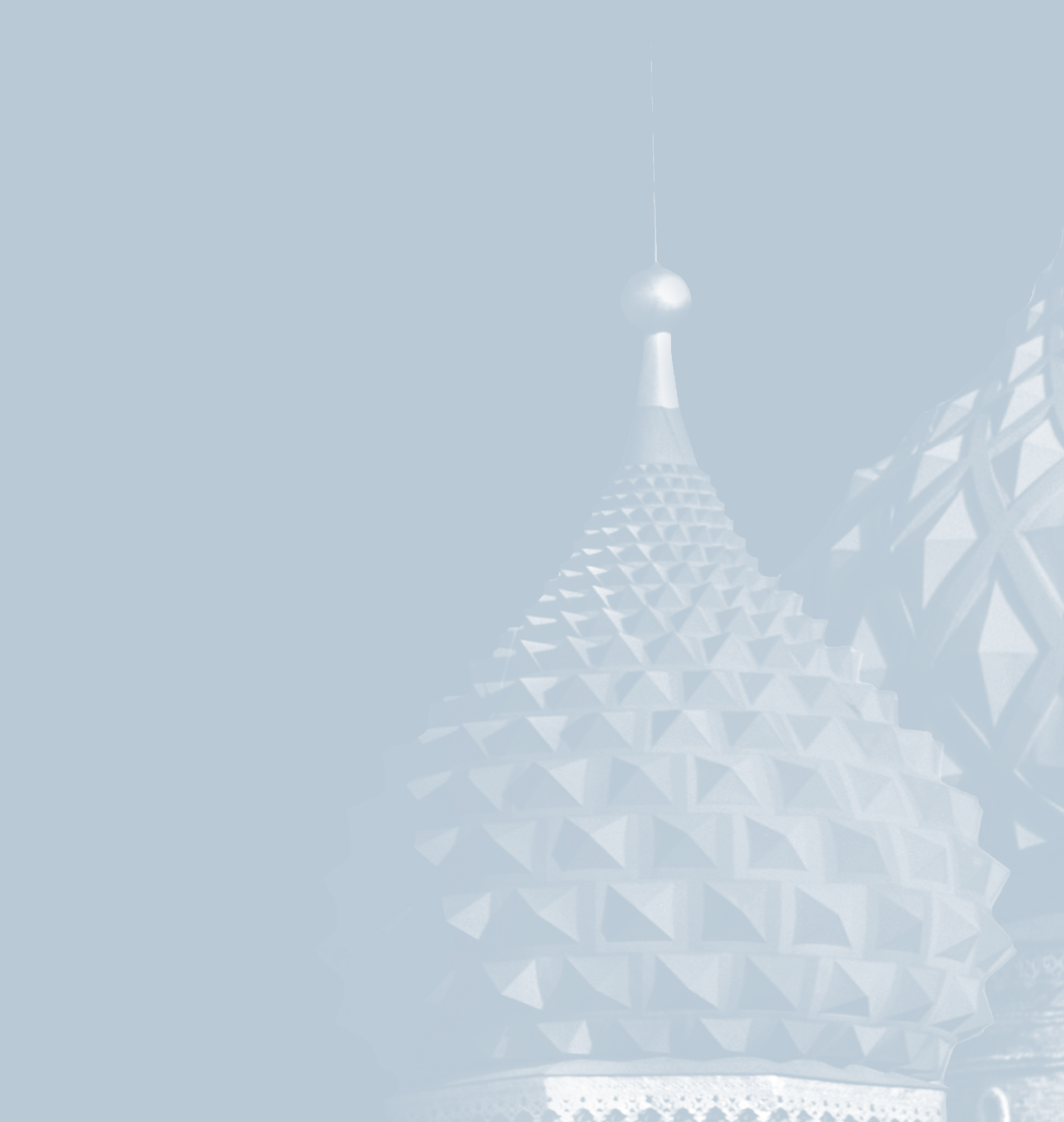
NOTES

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2. <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/news/2005/07/91016.shtml>.
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4. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
5. Bobo Lo, *A Fine Balance—The Strange Case of Sino-Russian Relations*, Paris: IFRI, April 2005, p. 8, <http://www.riia.org/pdf/research/rep/R0405e.pdf>.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
7. Zhao, p. 33.

8. Bruce Pannier, *Kazakhstan/China: Oil Deal Marks Beijing's First Foreign Energy Takeover*, Eurasianet.org, 24.08.2005, http://eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/pp082305_pr.shtml.
9. Marat Yermukanov, "China, Russian oil, and Kazakh pipelines", *Jamestown Foundation Monitor*, November 28, 2005.
10. Zhao, p. 35.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
13. Concept of Cooperation among SCO Member-States in Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism. Adopted in Astana on July 5, 2005. http://www.kremlin.ru/interdocs/2005/07/05/1307_type72067_90911.shtml?type=72067.
14. Julia Nanay, "Russia and the Caspian Sea Region," *Energy and Security: Toward a New Foreign Policy Strategy*, eds. Jan H. Kalicki and David L. Goldwyn (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; and Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005): 140, 142.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
16. Condoleezza Rice, Remarks at Eurasian National University, Astana, Kazakhstan, October 13, 2005. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/54913.htm>.
17. For example, the October 2005 call by the U.S. Congress not to pay Uzbekistan American dues for renting the Khanabad air-base came on the heels of an attempt by the European Union to introduce sanctions against Tashkent. Punitive measures can only be effective if backed by a broad range of influential international actors. The U.S. could face problems in trying to punish Uzbekistan unilaterally. With the EU endorsing the American approach, sanctions could become painful enough for Uzbek officials to affect Tashkent's foreign policy.
18. Richard E. Hoagland, "Tajikistan in the Central Asian Corridor of Reform", Speech at W.P. Carey Forum, August 11, 2005, http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/forum/WPC_2005_0811.htm.
19. *Siloviki* is the term commonly used by analysts to refer to the heads of "power-wielding" government bodies in Russia, such as the Defense and Interior Ministries, General Prosecutor's Office, domestic and foreign intelligence agencies, as well as a group of presidential aides known to have been career officers in Soviet and Russian intelligence agencies.
20. Hoagland, *op. cit.*
21. See, for example: Richard Weitz, "Revitalizing US-Russian Security Cooperation," *Adelphi Paper 377* (London: IISS, 2005).
22. Agreement on such a pipeline was discussed throughout the second half of 2005. A 1,750-mile pipeline from Iran to India through Pakistan will most likely be built by 2010 with an initial capacity of 60 million cubic meters of gas per day. See, for example: Stephen Blank, "Central Asia's Energy Game Intensifies," EurasiaNet Commentary, September 1, 2005, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav090105.shtml>.
23. It is projected that China's demand for oil will rise from 5 million barrels per day in 2004 to around 7 million barrels per day in 2010 (see Amy Myers Jaffe and Kenneth Medlock III, "China and Northeast Asia," in: *Energy and Security*, p. 267). Chinese energy consumption could increase at the pace of 4.4 percent annually over that period. China has set a target of 10 percent for the share of natural gas in national energy consumption by 2020 (Xiaojie Xu, *The Gas Dragon's Rise: Chinese Natural Gas Strategy and Import Patterns*, Baker Institute Working Paper, May 1998).
24. Jaffe and Medlock III, p. 285.
25. Rajan Menon, "Greater Central Asia," Russia, and the West: Challenges and Opportunities for Cooperation," *Russia's Engagement with the West: Transformation and Integration in the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Alexander B. Motyl, Blair A. Ruble and Lilia Shevtsova (Armonk, London: M.E.Sharpe, 2005): 216.
26. Angela E. Stent, "America and Russia: Paradoxes of Partnership," *Russia's Engagement with the West*, p. 277.
27. Vladimir Putin, Remarks at the Joint Press Conference with Robert Kocharian, President of Armenia, Yerevan, March 25, 2005, <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2005/03/85912.shtml>
28. See, for example, remarks by the mainstream prominent Russian political commentator Vyacheslav Nikonov. These remarks date

- back as far as September 2002.
<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?t=1015668420>.
29. See, for example: Elena Sitnina, "An Element of Decoration," *Vremya Novostei*, November 24, 2005, <http://www.vremya.ru/2005/219/8/139819.html>.
 30. Treaty on Alliance Relationship between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Uzbekistan, signed in Moscow on November 14, 2005. <http://www.mid.ru>.
 31. Ariel Cohen, "Competition over Eurasia: Are the U.S. and Russia on a Collision Course?" *Heritage Lecture #901*, October 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/hl901.cfm>.
 32. "Russian TV looks at role of NATO and Collective Security Treaty Organization," *BBC Monitoring*, December 2, 2005. Source: RTR Russia TV, Moscow, in Russian 16:45 gm, December 1, 2005.
 33. Interfax-AVN (Agency of Military News), December 8, 2005.
 34. "CSTO's Activities in the Period of Russian Chairmanship. The Values of Partnership," Remarks by Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergei Lavrov at EAPC Working Lunch, Brussels, December 8, 2005, <http://www.dkb.gov.ru>.
 35. Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, adopted on July 7, 2002, http://www.sectsc.org/news_detail.asp?id=96&LanguageID=2.
 36. Concept of Cooperation among SCO Member-States in Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism. Adopted in Astana on July 5, 2005, <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2005/07/90911.shtml>.
 37. Declaration of the Heads of States—Members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Adopted in Astana on July 5, 2005, <http://www.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2005/07/90910.shtml>.
 38. See, for example: "China and Russia: brothers in arms?" *The Japan Times*, August 25, 2005.
 39. See: Ariel Cohen and John J. Tkacik, Jr, "Sino-Russian Military Maneuvers: A Threat to U.S. Interests in Eurasia," *Heritage Backgrounder #1883*, September 30, 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg1883.cfm>.
 40. Interfax, Moscow, October 26, 2005.
 41. SCO adopted the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism at its summit in June 2001. In May 2003, SCO established a Bishkek-based Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The CSTO anti-terror center was set up in Bishkek in October 2002. In 2004, CSTO conducted two sets of military exercises aimed at combating terrorist activities and drug trafficking in Central Asia—operations codenamed "Rubezh-2004" and "Kanal-2004".
 42. As the 2004 SCO summit demonstrated, Russia and China diverge on what the main strategic objective of the Organization should be. While Beijing emphasizes the economic dimension and promotes free trade between Central Asia and China, Moscow prefers to address security issues, such as terrorism and drug trafficking.
 43. See, for example, the testimony of U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Mark Grossman before the Senate Armed Services Committee, February 28, 2002. <http://www.state.gov/p/8568.htm>.
 44. Stephen Blank, "Russia Looks to Build a New Security System in Eurasia," *Eurasia Insight*, January 4, 2006, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav010406.shtml>.
 45. See, for example: U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns, "A Renewed Partnership for Global Engagement," remarks at the European Institute Annual Gala Dinner, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC, December 15, 2005. <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/58488.htm>.
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 47. Ariel Cohen, John Tkacik, "Sino-Russian Military Maneuvers: A Threat to US Interests in Eurasia," *The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder #1883*, September 30, 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg1883.cfm?renderforprint=1>.
 48. Rajan Menon, "Greater Central Asia, Russia, and the West: Challenges and Opportunities for Cooperation," in: *Russia's Engagement with the West*, p. 219.

49. See: S. Frederick Starr, *A "Greater Central Asia Partnership" for Afghanistan and Its Neighbors*, Silk Road Paper (Washington, DC: Central Asia – Caucasus Institute, March 2005), <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/CACI/Strategy.pdf>.
50. Celeste A. Wallander, "Geopolitics and Neo-Containment, as well as Common Security: Russian Views on Proliferation," *PONARS Policy Memo No. 371*, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/pm_0371.pdf.
51. The CSTO anti-terror center was set up in Bishkek in October 2002. In June 2004 it was renamed Regional Anti-terror Structure and moved to Tashkent.
52. Stephen Blank, "The Central Asian Dimension of Russo-Chinese Exercises," *Central Asia—Caucasus Analyst*, Vol. 6, no. 18, 21 September 2005, p. 6, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/issues/20050921Analyst.pdf>.
53. Over the years of the George W. Bush Administration, the "strategy of integration" was outspokenly advocated by such prominent U.S. foreign policy practitioners and analysts, such as Council on Foreign Relations President Richard Haass, former Department of Defense staffer Thomas Barnett and the prominent Georgetown scholar G. John Ikenburry. In his *After Victory* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001) Ikenburry stressed the importance of formal institutions, such as comprehensive international organizations and regimes in preventing the emergence of dangerous coalitions against the United States. He argued that the United States should embed itself in a binding institutional network to avoid an excessive anti-American backlash. Barnett, in his *The Pentagon's New Map* (New York, NY: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 2004) portrayed world politics in the form of a split between an "Integrated Core" and a "Non-Integrated Gap". He thinks that breaking resistance to integration in some parts of the Gap is a cause that warrants the use of U.S. military force. Finally, in the recently published volume *The Opportunity. America's Moment to Alter History's Course* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2005), Haass emphasized the need for pragmatically dealing with powerful states so that they could be "integrated" with the U.S. and its allies or harnessed to the American cause on the world arena.
54. A. Elizabeth Jones, "US-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term," Testimony before the House International Relations Committee, Washington, DC, March 18, 2004, <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/30556.htm>.



Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004-3027

Tel. (202) 691-4100 Fax (202) 691-4247

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