

A REPORT OF THE CSIS RUSSIA
AND EURASIA PROGRAM

The United States and Central Asia after 2014



January 2013

Author

Jeffrey Mankoff



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Foreword by

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Cover photos: (Main) Bukhara, Uzbekistan. Photo by Jeffrey Mankoff. (Top) Kazakh soldier at a check point during the start of Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalion (CENTRASBAT) 2000 exercises. Photo by TSgt. Jim Varhegyi (USAF), http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kazakhstan_paratrooper.jpg. (Bottom) Financial district of Almaty, Kazakhstan. Photo by Jeffrey Mankoff.

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Political Map of Central Asia, 2008, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Central_Asia_-_political_map_2008.svg



FOREWORD

The planned U.S. withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan in 2014 demands that the United States recast its foreign policy toward Central Asia. For more than a decade since 9/11, U.S. policy toward Central Asian states has been dominated by the exigencies of the war in Afghanistan, including notably military bases in the region and facilitation of military supplies for U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan. The war has provided a real agenda for concrete cooperation with Central Asian states and even promoted some regional cooperation, but it has also skewed U.S. interests, not to ignore, but certainly to de-emphasize the endemic problems of governance and corruption, as well as serious human rights violations. The scaling down of the military effort in Afghanistan creates an opportunity for the United States to review and likely rebalance its Central Asia policy, but it also has sparked regional fears of a near total U.S. disengagement that Central Asian elites believe will result in increased threats to their security, as well as diminish their sovereignty vis-à-vis major powers, notably Russia and China.

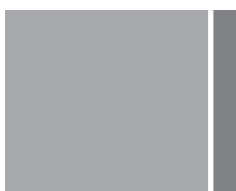
As Jeffrey Mankoff has deftly outlined in this very thoughtful CSIS report, Central Asia is bound to become less central to U.S. foreign and security policy following the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, but it will remain consequential. The region's principal threats emanate from domestic governance problems and weak state institutions that heighten the possibility for political instability, and the region's two largest states, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, face uncertain succession challenges for leaderships that date back to the Soviet period. Poor governance and failed policies also increase the danger that Islamist groups may radicalize and be attracted to global jihadist ideologies—precisely the problem that the region faced before 9/11 when the war in Afghanistan directed these forces to the south. While Central Asian states, as Mankoff notes, are wont to overstate the threat of radicalized Islamic groups in order to justify more oppressive authoritarian rule at home, we cannot ignore the possibility that these threats could increase in light of the U.S. withdrawal.

The United States' drawdown of forces in Afghanistan will most likely diminish regional collective security, and the core challenge for the Obama administration will be to creatively find new means and partnerships to reduce the chances of threats emerging from the region, as was the case with al Qaeda based in Afghanistan during the Taliban period, as well as the possibility of intra-regional conflict. This will require greater cooperation among the Central Asian states themselves, as well as with Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and others. Especially essential in the near term will be working out cooperative arrangements between NATO, Russia, and Central Asian states. This is no mean feat, and the notion routinely sparks concern about Russian efforts to dominate the region, and certainly for Washington to acknowledge any shared interests with Tehran, let alone actively engage Iran, often seems a bridge too far. Still, the United States must be realistic, understanding that Russia and China, and probably India later, will have the most influence in the region, but that a U.S. role in knitting together regional security and cooperative

arrangements will be indispensable, especially from the standpoint of the Central Asian states themselves. In this report, Jeffrey Mankoff offers a number of useful recommendations that are grounded in regional realities that can help advance the agenda for security cooperation, as well as promote more sustainable regional economic growth.

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THE UNITED STATES AND CENTRAL ASIA AFTER 2014

The war in Afghanistan has led the United States and its International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners to pay unprecedented attention to Central Asia as a staging ground and strategic rear.¹ With the impending drawdown of international forces from Afghanistan, Central Asia will cease being on the front lines of U.S. global strategy, particularly as Washington shifts its focus to the Asia-Pacific region and reins in defense spending after more than a decade of war. These shifts threaten to undermine Central Asia's precarious stability, which could in turn create new problems for the United States and the broader international community. As the United States transitions away from its decade-plus focus on the Afghan war, it will need to remain engaged not only in Afghanistan but also next door in Central Asia. U.S. engagement should focus on strengthening intraregional cooperation and bolstering the resiliency of Central Asia's weak states.

In the short run, Central Asia will continue to matter to the United States because of its internal fragility and the potential for state breakdown, which could increase the dangers posed by conflict, refugee flows, crime, radicalization, and terrorism. Central Asia's weak states are at odds among themselves and are incapable of addressing the threats of crime, drugs, and extremism coursing through the region. Central Asia is also at risk in the longer term of again becoming the focal point for great power rivalries involving the West, Russia, and increasingly China. A renewed geopolitical "Great Game" would, however, only distract these outside powers from the dangers that Central Asia's fragility poses to all of them as transnational criminal groups and jihadists increasingly secure a toehold. Renewed strategic competition between the outside powers would further undermine stability within Central Asia. Uncertainty surrounding the future of Afghanistan and the role of the United States exacerbates the problem.

The U.S. faces several challenges in developing a post-2014 strategy for Central Asia. Perhaps the most fundamental is that, even with the best of intentions, Central Asia will no longer be as high a priority for Washington as it has been for the past decade, and will never be as high a priority for the U.S. as it is for Russia and China (and in the longer term, perhaps India). The emergence of failed states in the region could nevertheless have serious consequences for U.S. security, just as the failure of Afghanistan did before September 11, 2001. As the primary threats to U.S. interests come more from within Central Asia than from outside powers, the U.S. cannot afford to view Central Asia mainly through the prism of its relations with Russia and China, as it appeared to do for much of the pre-9/11 period. Stabilizing Central Asia requires connecting it to the global economy, which in turn can only be done with Russian and Chinese support. Seeking actively to limit the Russian and Chinese presence in Central Asia is therefore both counter to U.S. interests in Central Asia's long-term stabilization, and unlikely to succeed.

1. Central Asia here refers to the five post-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

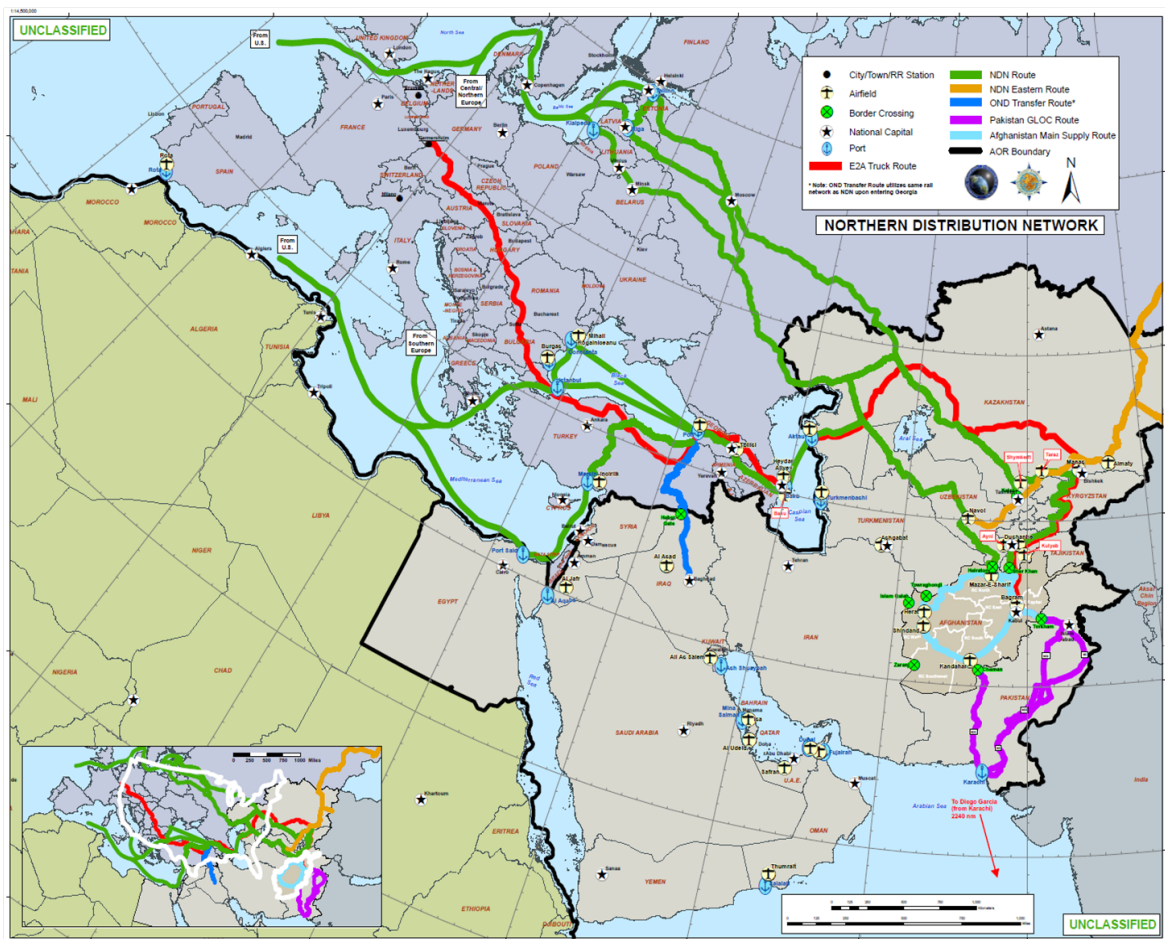
At the same time, continued U.S. economic and political engagement with the region is needed. Neither Moscow nor Beijing is in a position to address the regional fault lines and sources of domestic instability. The European Union will continue to play a positive role, but will have to prioritize resolving its internal challenges for the foreseeable future. Central Asia's leaders recognize the contribution that the U.S. can play in bolstering their capacity to deal with domestic and regional challenges; they also understand that, because the U.S. is not a regional power capable of exerting hegemony, an active U.S. role helps them maintain a regional balance and preserves their own room to maneuver.

For the U.S. to play such a role, however, it will have to stop seeing Central Asia primarily through the lens of Afghanistan, while focusing more directly on problems indigenous to the region. By allowing its relationships with the Central Asian states to be dominated by security cooperation in the context of the war (including transit and hosting military bases), the U.S. has largely forfeited its ability to address the internal and regional challenges facing the region. Meanwhile, the Afghan conflict has forged a degree of cooperation among the five Central Asian states that will be difficult to sustain, especially without continued U.S. diplomatic pressure and economic incentives. Uncertain about the future of U.S. engagement, the Central Asian countries are moving increasingly toward a zero-sum view of interactions with one another (including over their respective approaches to Afghanistan). If anything, Washington's efforts to ensure continued access for its military after 2014 risk exacerbating these tensions, both within Central Asia and with Russia.

As it withdraws from Afghanistan, Washington's challenge will lie in finding a stable equilibrium between abandoning Central Asia to its demons and engaging in counterproductive balance-of-power games with Moscow and Beijing. In particular, the U.S. should limit the degree to which Central Asia serves as a transit route for transnational threats (e.g., drugs and, more important, extremism and terrorism) from Afghanistan and Pakistan; promote incremental reform within Central Asia to ameliorate the threat that the region itself will become a locus of instability; and avoid returning to a zero-sum dynamic with Moscow and Beijing in the region. Maintaining a productive relationship with Russia and China will in turn require caution from the U.S. as it plans for postwar military cooperation with the Central Asian governments, and a commitment to avoid becoming locked into a mutually dependent relationship with any single state in the region. Finally, the U.S. and its allies will also need to sustain a robust commitment to Afghanistan to ensure that the gains of the past decade are not squandered in the absence of foreign military forces, which could destroy U.S. credibility not only in Afghanistan but also across the broader region.

Central Asia and the War in Afghanistan

Washington has turned to the five Central Asian states to play a variety of roles in U.S./ISAF operations in Afghanistan. The Central Asian governments have embraced these roles out of a desire to ensure stability next door in Afghanistan, an interest in strong partnerships with the U.S. to guard against excessive reliance on Russia or China, and the ability to benefit from opportunities for rent-seeking. Most significantly, the Central Asians have agreed to permit the U.S. and its allies to transit personnel and matériel across their territory, lessening the coalition's reliance on lines of communication through Pakistan. They have also provided diplomatic support to the government of Hamid Karzai, pulling back from their earlier support of non-Pashtun militias in the North that undermined prospects for a unified Afghan state, and have helped facilitate international development projects in Afghanistan. Central Asia's proximity to Afghanistan and support for the coali-



The Northern Distribution Network (Source: U.S. Transportation Command)

tion's war against the Taliban has led to a convergence of interests with the U.S. and its partners, and to an unprecedented level of U.S. engagement in the region. The West's political and financial support has in turn encouraged regional governments to surmount or downplay many of the domestic and regional challenges they face, challenges that are likely to reemerge once Central Asia no longer occupies its central position in U.S. strategy after the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Central Asia's most important contribution to the war effort in Afghanistan has been hosting U.S. military bases and participating in logistical efforts through the Northern Distribution Network (NDN). Before the end of 2001, Washington had reached agreements with the governments of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan to station forces on their territory, and began dispatching troops to bases at Manas (Kyrgyzstan) and Karshi-Khanabad (Uzbekistan). Operated by the U.S. Air Force, Manas serves primarily as a transit facility for moving personnel and equipment into and out of Afghanistan and providing services such as aerial refueling.² Virtually all the personnel flown into and out of Afghanistan (over 400,000 as of mid-2012) pass through Manas. Before being expelled in 2005 over U.S. criticism of Uzbek security forces' crackdown on protesters in the city of Andijon, the U.S. military used Karshi-Khanabad for a variety of missions, including as a logistics hub for both air and ground transportation into Afghanistan,

2. U.S. Air Force, "Transit Center at Manas: Fact Sheet," July 20, 2010, <http://www.manas.afcent.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=12682>.

hosting of special operations forces, and stationing of combat aircraft (Uzbekistan continues to host a German contingent at Termez, allows commercial forwarding of supplies through Navoi, and is engaged in talks with the U.S. on restoring security ties disrupted by Andijon). ISAF also has direct military cooperation with Tajikistan, which conducts refueling operations for coalition aircraft, hosts a small contingent of French jets at Dushanbe airport, and allows coalition aircraft to cross its territory. Turkmenistan allows humanitarian overflights and provides refueling for coalition aircraft, while Kazakhstan allows overflights and offered the coalition contingency access to its facilities.³ In early 2013, Kazakhstan also opened a new transit hub for the French at Shymkent.

Additionally, the bulk of the coalition's nonlethal supplies (e.g., vehicles, construction supplies, personal kit, and rations) travels by ground across the NDN. This web of surface transit routes was established in 2009 on the basis of agreements signed by the U.S. (followed by NATO and other ISAF partner countries) with governments in Europe (including Russia), the Caucasus, and Central Asia.⁴ Before the establishment of the NDN, nearly 90 percent of U.S. nonlethal goods were unloaded in the Pakistani port of Karachi and carried overland to Afghanistan. By late 2011, the U.S. was shipping three-quarters of its sustainment cargo across the NDN, and 40 percent of total cargo (compared with 31 percent by air and 29 percent through Pakistan).⁵ Washington's ISAF partners have similarly increased their reliance on the Central Asian routes.

This turn to Central Asia for logistical support and as a hedge against the difficult security and political environment in Pakistan has been a financial and strategic boon for the Central Asian states. It has also forced the U.S. to be highly circumspect about criticizing them, for fear of disrupting this logistical cooperation.

Compared with the alternate route through Pakistan, which has been frequently blocked for both weather and political reasons, transit through Central Asia has been both reliable and secure. This reliability comes at a price: Each container shipped across the NDN costs ISAF about \$17,500, compared with \$7,200 for shipments across Pakistan.⁶ Collectively, the four Central Asian states that provide ground transit (i.e., excluding Turkmenistan) receive approximately \$500 million per year in transit fees, in addition to the fees paid to commercial shipping companies. In early June 2012, the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed an additional agreement with NATO on "reverse transit," allowing ISAF to use the NDN for shipping equipment out of Afghanistan in the course of the withdrawal. This agreement, whose precise contents have not been made public, ensures that the regional cooperation underpinning the NDN will continue at least through 2014. Press re-

3. "Khanabad, Uzbekistan: Karshi-Kanabad [sic] (K2) Airbase," GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/khanabad.htm>; "Tajikistan Facilities," GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/centralasia/tajikistan.htm>; Deirdre Tynan, "Turkmenistan: Ashgabat Hosts U.S. Military Refueling, Supply Operations," EurasiaNet, July 7, 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav070809.shtml>.

4. The NDN began in January 2009 with supplies shipped by the United States under the auspices of bilateral agreements with the various transit states. These were supplemented by a NATO agreement that came into effect in June 2010, as well as bilateral agreements between other ISAF partners and the transit state governments.

5. U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Central Asia and the Transition in Afghanistan," Majority Staff Report, December 19, 2011. Total cargo also includes weapons, ammunition, and other "lethal" goods, which are not permitted on the NDN.

6. Deirdre Tynan, "Central Asia: Who's the Big Winner in the NDN Sweepstakes?" EurasiaNet, February 7, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64969>.

ports indicate that Uzbekistan will charge a 50 percent markup over the normal commercial rail tariffs for this reverse transit.⁷ Accessing this revenue stream has encouraged the Central Asian states to put aside their differences, at least on the question of transit. It has also helped entrench the widespread corruption affecting all the Central Asian states by providing a new source of revenue.

The five Central Asian states have also participated in development projects in Afghanistan (though only Kazakhstan has committed its own funds).⁸ Kazakhstan has provided training for Afghan students and officials at its universities, and it has committed around \$8 million in bilateral development assistance.⁹ With financing from the Asian Development Bank, Uzbekistan's state railway corporation constructed a railway line from the Uzbek border city of Hairaton across the Afghan border to Mazar-e Sharif, which opened in August 2011, and which gives Afghanistan its only rail connection to the outside world. Tashkent would like to extend this rail line across Afghanistan, allowing Uzbekistan to boost its exports to South Asia (as it is most exports from double-landlocked Uzbekistan to countries outside the former Soviet Union cross Iran). Tashkent has also worked with the international community to build bridges across the Amu Darya River and install fiber-optic cables linking Afghanistan to global networks. In recent years, Uzbekistan has emerged as Afghanistan's major electricity supplier, thanks to the internationally funded expansion of its generation and transmission infrastructure. Uzbekistan sold more than 1.2 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity to Afghanistan last year, notwithstanding power shortages at home.¹⁰

Turkmenistan has participated in some reconstruction projects, and is strongly backing the so-called TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline, first mooted by Unocal in the 1990s. Kyrgyzstan allows the World Food Program to deliver assistance to Afghanistan across its territory, and it has agreed to host a small number of Afghan refugees. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have also pursued financing through the Russian and international development bank-supported CASA-1000 initiative to sell energy from their hydroelectric stations to Afghanistan and Pakistan. This effort has, however, contributed to the intraregional competition that continues to bedevil Central Asia. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are backing mutually exclusive transmission schemes, while Uzbekistan is racing to expand its own generation and distribution capability to preempt the Tajiks and Kyrgyz, whose plans for new hydroelectric stations could weaken Uzbekistan's political leverage and potentially damage Uzbek agriculture.¹¹

Regional Rivalries

This competition for electricity markets is one example of the general disunity that continues to plague Central Asia, even over Afghanistan, and which the uncertainty about Afghanistan's post-2014 future is exacerbating. Before start of the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan, the Central Asians (along with the Russians) all backed the anti-Taliban movements that eventually merged into the Northern

7. Charles Recknagel, "Neighboring Countries Scramble to be NATO's Exit Route from Afghanistan," RFE/RL, March 21, 2012.

8. For an overview, see Uwe Halbach, "Afghanistan in der Politik Russlands und Zentralasiens: Der Truppenabzug vom Hindukusch als Herausforderung für den GUS-Raum," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) Studie*, November 2011 (31): 24–25.

9. Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, "Commitment to Assist Afghanistan," <http://www.kazakhembus.com/index.php?page=commitment-to-assist-afghanistan>.

10. *UzDaily*, February 18, 2012, <http://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-17486.htm>.

11. Ravshan M. Alimov, "The Situation in Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities for Central Asia," http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia_Jan012/rav.htm.

Alliance, but in ways that undermined Afghan unity. This support benefited from the fact that these groups were largely composed of ethnic Tajiks (Jamiat-e Islami, led by Ahmad Shah Massoud and Burhanuddin Rabbani) and Uzbeks (Junbish-e Milli, led by Abdul Rashid Dostum). During the Afghan civil war, Uzbekistan provided military assistance to Dostum's forces, hoping that an Uzbek-led fiefdom in northern Afghanistan could serve as a buffer against Taliban fundamentalism and chaos further south.¹² Tajikistan likewise maintained contacts with Massoud's forces, which in turn provided refuge and supplies to progovernment forces during Tajikistan's civil war in the 1990s.¹³

Though Tashkent denies currently providing assistance to Dostum (who serves as nominal chairman of the Afghan army's joint chiefs of staff), his battle-hardened forces give Uzbekistan a strong card should the Afghan civil war resume.¹⁴ Unlike its Central Asian neighbors, Tashkent refused to sign the declaration issued by the November 2011 Istanbul Summit calling for greater regional cooperation and, among other provisions, committing signatories to support Afghanistan's sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity.¹⁵ The declaration issued by the follow-up "Heart of Asia" summit, which met in Kabul in June 2012, dropped the language on noninterference entirely, a reflection that Afghanistan's neighbors were increasingly concerned by what the coalition would leave behind and interested in keeping their individual options open.¹⁶ This lack of a common approach has complicated attempts to develop a regional framework for managing Afghanistan's future and represents an additional source of uncertainty for the region.

To be sure, regional mistrust is not only, or even mainly, about Afghanistan. It stems from border disputes (especially in the Ferghana Valley, which is shared by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), competing ambitions for regional leadership between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, resource sharing, ethnic tensions, and a host of other issues, some dating back to Soviet times. Relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are particularly fraught, stemming in part from Tashkent's intervention in the Tajik Civil War and Dushanbe's ambivalent attitude toward the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the 1990s.

Distrust continues to block regional cooperation, and has contributed to the worsening regional security environment. Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are locked in a trade dispute that threatens to delay Kazakhstan's path into the World Trade Organization.¹⁷ Onerous regulations and frequent closure of border crossing points inhibit cross-border trade throughout the region.¹⁸ Tashkent has halted rail travel across its territory to Tajikistan on several occasions since 2009,

12. "Northern Alliance," *Global Security.org*, http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/northern_alliance.htm. Dostum first fled to Uzbekistan after the Taliban took over Mazar-e Sharif, before moving on to Turkey and later returning to Afghanistan.

13. Joshua Foust, *Post-Soviet Central Asian National Interests in Afghanistan* (New York: Century Foundation, 2010).

14. Ankara also long supported Dostum, who for a time fled to Turkey after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. Turkey has subsequently sought to distance itself from Dostum, while continuing to cultivate links with the ethnic Uzbek and Turkmen minorities in northern Afghanistan.

15. Declaration of the Istanbul Conference, November 2, 2011, <http://www.cfr.org/afghanistan/declaration-istanbul-process-regional-security-cooperation-secure-stable-afghanistan/p26434>.

16. See Chinmaya R. Gharekan and Karl F. Inderfurth, "An Umbrella for Afghan Stability," *New York Times*, June 29, 2012.

17. "Bishkek shantazhiruet Astanu peregovorami po VTO," Rosbalt, October 25, 2012, <http://www.rosbalt.ru/exussr/2012/10/25/1050711.html>.

18. Cristine Cannata, "Central Asia: Issues in Regional Trade and Integration," Atlantic Council, Patriciu Eurasia Center Backgrounder, http://www.acus.org/files/Eurasia/ACUS_CentralAsia_Backgrounder.pdf.

while state energy monopoly Uztransgaz has occasionally cut exports to Tajikistan, most recently in December 2012. Uzbekistan has effectively sealed its border with Tajikistan, sowing much of the 1,000-kilometer border region with land mines. As much as 20 percent of the border is still disputed; demarcation talks were suspended for three years when Tajikistan rejected a 2009 Uzbek proposal that would have given Tashkent control of a disputed reservoir. Following violence against ethnic Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan in September 2010, which caused tens of thousands of ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan to flee into Uzbekistan, Tashkent moved to also seal and mine much of its border with Kyrgyzstan; Bishkek meanwhile claims more than 80 border skirmishes took place between 2009 and mid-2011.¹⁹

Underlying these regional rivalries is the fact that each of the five Central Asian states views the war in Afghanistan and its impact in different terms. Uzbekistan accuses both the Afghan government and its Central Asian neighbors of fueling the regional drug trade, and has openly declared its preference for a unilateral diplomatic approach, which includes a regional peace initiative (termed the 6 + 3, i.e., Afghanistan and its five neighbors plus the U.S., Russia, and NATO) that no one else has backed.²⁰ Meanwhile, Ashgabat was rumored to be paying off the Taliban to stay away from the Turkmen-Afghan border, even while touting its support for multilateral peace plans.²¹ Tajikistan is participating in a four-way counternarcotics initiative with Russia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, but without its Central Asian neighbors.

Among the biggest—and partially linked—problems are water and the role of Russia. Bishkek and Dushanbe would like to complete a pair of massive Soviet-era hydroelectric stations (Kambarata-1 in Kyrgyzstan and Rogun in Tajikistan) that could significantly boost their energy production and provide a rallying point for national pride in Central Asia's poorest countries. Russia has given mixed signals about its willingness to back these dams, using its support as leverage to promote its own interests and perpetuate regional disunity. At the same time, Russia has sought to deepen its security relationships with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in part to hedge against post-2014 instability, but also to extend its own influence and put pressure on Uzbekistan, which has long sought to escape Russia's orbit.

Rogun would be the tallest dam in the world, capable by itself of producing 13.3 billion kWh of electricity a year, while Kambarata-1 would produce an additional 5 billion kWh per year. The two dams would make Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan self-sufficient in energy, and could significantly change a regional balance of power that now favors Uzbekistan, which currently supplies Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with the bulk of their electricity. Tashkent argues that these power stations would exacerbate Uzbek farmers' water shortages and cause irreparable environmental damage.²² Given the high price of constructing the dams (more than two-thirds of each country's gross domestic product), foreign investment is crucial. Tajikistan in particular is seeking international financing by linking Rogun to Afghan stabilization, arguing that the dam will allow it to feed more power into the CASA-1000 initiative and will provide irrigation to help wean Afghan farmers from growing opium.

19. Vladimir Mukhin, "Tsentral'noaziatskii mirotvorcheskii vopros," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, May 13, 2011.

20. Bruce Pannier, "Central Asian States Profess Unity, but Grow Farther Apart," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, August 3, 2009.

21. George Gavrillis, "Why Regional Solutions Won't Help Afghanistan: The Myth of Neighborly Harmony," *Foreign Affairs*, October 18, 2011.

22. For a good overview, see Eurasian Development Bank, "Water and Energy Resources in Central Asia: Utilization and Development Issues," Industry Report, April 24, 2008, http://www.eabr.org/general/upload/docs/Report_2_water_and_energy_EDB.pdf.

The Kremlin encouraged Russia's largest aluminum producer, RusAl, to fund the completion of Rogun in 2004, only to pull back after Uzbekistan reoriented its foreign relations back toward Russia (expelling the U.S. military from its base at Karshi-Khanabad and joining the Moscow-backed Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in the aftermath of its dispute with Washington over Andijon.²³ In February 2009, Moscow announced that it would provide Kyrgyzstan more than \$2 billion to complete Kambarata-1 (and to aid the reelection campaign of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev), with the implicit understanding that Bishkek would then force the Americans to leave the Manas airbase. Uzbekistan predictably denounced the Russian offer. When Bakiyev struck a new deal with the U.S. on Manas a few months later, Moscow responded first by suspending its line of credit for the dam—and then supporting Bakiyev's ouster from power.²⁴ Following Uzbekistan's suspension of its CSTO membership in June 2012, Putin again pledged Russian support for the dam projects—though without specific financial commitments—in the course of state visits to Bishkek and Dushanbe in the succeeding months.²⁵

Another component of Russia's efforts to maintain its regional influence that has exacerbated existing mistrust (especially between Uzbekistan on one side and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan on the other) is security cooperation and the presence of Russian military facilities. Kyrgyzstan hosts a Russian airbase at Kant (along with some naval and seismic facilities), which many in the Russian military see as a way to balance the U.S. presence at Manas and to exert influence in Kyrgyzstan's unstable politics. Moscow has also sought to establish a second base in southern Kyrgyzstan for the CSTO's new Rapid Reaction Force, but has so far been stymied by Uzbekistan's opposition. Russia's 7,000-strong 201st Military Base (formerly 201st Motor Rifle Brigade), a legacy of the 1992–1997 Tajik Civil War, remains based in Tajikistan. During Putin's visit to Dushanbe in October 2012, the two countries agreed to extend this deployment for another 30 years (Moscow had been pursuing a 49-year extension). Russian border troops also patrolled Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan until 2005, when they were withdrawn at Dushanbe's request.²⁶ Fear that the ISAF withdrawal will precipitate renewed cross-border instability from Afghanistan led Moscow to pressure Dushanbe to allow the redeployment of these troops in 2011.²⁷ Dushanbe has also dangled the prospect of access to its Ayni airfield before Moscow as an inducement for Russian investment in Rogun and support in its long-standing quarrel with Uzbekistan over water.²⁸ Meanwhile, Uzbekistan long sought to block the formation of the Rapid Reaction Force entirely and then, when the force was finally established, refused to join before announcing in June 2012 that it was suspending its membership in the CSTO entirely.

Uzbekistan's long-standing estrangement from its neighbors threatens to complicate Washington's interest in ensuring continued military access to Central Asia following the withdrawal of its

23. Régis Genté, "Rogoun, le barrage qui divise l'Asie central," *Le Figaro*, March 11, 2012.

24. Eelke P. Kraak, "Power Nexus Skews Kyrgyz Dam Deal," *Asia Times*, April 21, 2012.

25. "Sovmestnoe zayavlenie po itogam ofitsial'nogo vizita Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii V. V. Putina v Respubliku Tadjikistan," the Kremlin, October 5, 2012, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/1320/print; "Sovmestnoe zayavlenie po itogam ofitsial'nogo vizita Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii v Kirgizskuyu Respubliku," the Kremlin, September 20, 2012, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/1311/print.

26. For an overview, see Viktor Baranets, "Vo chto nam obkhodyatsya voennye bazy za granitsej?" *Komsomol'skaya Pravda*, June 13, 2012.

27. Vladimir Socor, "Tajikistan Seeks Shorter Term, Better Compensation for Russian Military Base," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, July 10, 2012.

28. Deirdre Tynan, "Tajikistan: Dushanbe Dangling Ayni Airbase Before Russians," EurasiaNet, October 19, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/62187>.

forces from Afghanistan. Eager to assert its independence from the emerging Moscow-led regional order, Uzbekistan has embraced security cooperation with the United States to a greater degree than its neighbors. U.S. officials have made frequent trips to Uzbekistan, and the U.S. has recently stepped up its security assistance (which was curtailed in the aftermath of Andijon), even as Russian press reports fret that the U.S. may be angling for a long-term military presence—perhaps to replace Manas should the Kyrgyz government follow through on its promises to expel U.S. forces after the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Given Tashkent’s difficult relations with both its neighbors and with Russia, such a U.S.-Uzbek strategic partnership risks making the U.S. a party to Uzbekistan’s disputes. In the event that Tashkent sought to resolve some of its disputes with neighboring states by force (as it did on occasion in the 1990s), the U.S. could find itself caught between its dependence on Uzbek cooperation and its desire to prevent a regional crisis.

Internal Challenges

Bad as Central Asia’s intramural rivalries are, the biggest dangers to stability in the years after 2014 lie in the dysfunctional political and social environments within the individual Central Asian states, which the U.S. focus on security has left Washington in a poor position to address. Across the region, repressive governments and a lack of opportunities fuel discontent occasionally tinged with radicalism. Outside Kazakhstan, booming populations and corruption magnify this discontent, while also sapping governments’ ability to respond to the underlying social and economic problems they face. Corruption flourishes in part because Central Asia has emerged as the major route through which Afghan drugs reach markets in Russia and Europe. State capacity in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in particular has been compromised by drug-related corruption, while Turkmenistan has declared drug addiction (including among members of the security services) a national catastrophe.²⁹ ISAF’s failure to address the production of opium inside Afghanistan has contributed to the problem.

Difficult socioeconomic conditions across the region exacerbate the challenges posed by the drug trade. According to International Monetary Fund calculations, per capita gross domestic product (at purchasing power parity) ranges from \$13,000 in Kazakhstan to less than \$2,500 in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.³⁰ Yet even relatively well-off, stable Kazakhstan endured violent protests by oil workers in the western city of Zhanaozen late last year. Power transitions, which sparked serious unrest in Kyrgyzstan in both 2005 and 2010, will continue to pose a challenge in states where power has become personalized to a greater degree even than in other post-Soviet states—especially in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.³¹ The ethnic tensions that roiled southern Kyrgyzstan in mid-2010 continue to simmer, most seriously in the Ferghana Valley. Although Central Asia has remained comparatively immune to Islamist violence so far, the proximity of Afghanistan and Pakistan, coupled with a lack of opportunities and harsh suppression of religious dissent on the part of Central Asian governments, is laying a foundation for the emergence of religiously based opposition groups, some of them violent.

29. Aysha Berdyeva, “Narkomaniya v Turkmenii nosit mashtaby natsional’nogo bedstviya,” *Deutsche Welle*, 21 Dec 2011, <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,6363081,00.html>.

30. International Monetary Fund, “World Economic Outlook Database, April 2012,” <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01/weodata/index.aspx>.

31. See Eric McGlinchey, “Central Asia Grows Wobbly,” *Current History* 111, no. 747 (October 2012): 275–280.

Problems appear most immediate in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (though much larger Uzbekistan is also deeply troubled), both of which exhibit elements of failed states and could deteriorate further in the absence of significant foreign assistance. A lack of funds has already contributed to the breakdown of much Soviet-era infrastructure in both countries. It has also led to a serious shortage of teachers, doctors, and other specialists, which feeds a vicious circle of underdevelopment.³² Both also suffer from rampant corruption, which has left their respective governments incapable of addressing the mounting social problems they face.

In Tajikistan, corruption has been an important tool for holding the country together in the aftermath of the civil war: By distributing opportunities for rent-seeking among various opposition groups, the government of President Emomali Rakhmon has been able to co-opt rival groups, which were motivated less by ideology than by regionally based grievances. In the years since the end of the civil war in 1997, the venality of Tajik elites has led them to focus on extracting rents from the more developed parts of the country, leaving the poorer rural areas almost free of central control. International assistance is used to offset funds from the state budget, which then find their way into officials' pockets.³³ Meanwhile, segments of the population face chronic power shortages and have several times stood on the verge of wintertime famine because of bad weather and the collapse of distribution networks.

Tajikistan has also emerged as the main route for the export of Afghan narcotics, and the resulting influx of drug money has been a major source of corruption. Trafficking enjoys protection at various levels of the Tajik government (the UN Office of Drug Control estimates that less than 5 percent of the narcotics trafficked through Tajikistan is seized).³⁴ Foreign assistance for counternarcotics agencies has allowed the government to turn them into tools for eliminating rival traffickers and concentrating the flows of money and drugs in the hands of a few well-connected groups. Given the general decay of Tajikistan's economy, the drug business may account for as much as 30 to 50 percent of total economic activity in the country (apart from drugs, the Tajik economy's principal lifeline is migration; Moscow estimates that around 700,000 Tajik citizens have moved to Russia as migrant laborers, though unofficial estimates suggest the number could be well over 1 million). In a perverse way, drug money may be the only thing keeping Tajikistan from imploding completely.³⁵ Such extensive criminalization of the state has, however, made it difficult for foreign actors to consider Dushanbe a reliable interlocutor.

Kyrgyzstan's halting progress toward democracy has to a degree overshadowed the collapse of its own capacity for governance. Organized crime is widespread and deeply enmeshed with state institutions. Local observers and foreign analysts suspect that the violence in southern Kyrgyzstan that accompanied Bakiyev's May 2010 ouster was fueled in part by drug gangs fearful of losing their connection to the state leadership (the gangs saw Bakiyev, who lacked much of a popular support base, as especially pliable; he abolished Kyrgyzstan's drug control agency in 2009).³⁶

32. See Paul Quinn-Judge, "Routes, hôpitaux, écoles: Le délabrement de l'Asie central," International Crisis Group, March 9, 2011, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/quinn-judge-routes-hopitaux-ecoles-le-delabrement-de-lasie-centrale.aspx>.

33. International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure," Asia Report 162 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2009).

34. See Richard Rousseau, "A Stable Afghanistan Is Unlikely without a Secure Tajikistan," *Global Asia*, May 31, 2012.

35. "Addicted: Heroin Stabilises a Poor Country," *The Economist*, April 21, 2012.

36. David Trilling, "Organized Crime Helps Stir Instability in Kyrgyzstan's Southern Provinces," EurasiaNet, May 17, 2010, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/61078>.

The fall of Bakiyev and the transformation of Kyrgyzstan into a parliamentary democracy, now led by President Almazbek Atambayev, have not fundamentally weakened the hold of organized crime. If anything, the almost perpetual turmoil that has afflicted Kyrgyzstan since the 2005 Tulip Revolution has further damaged state institutions, creating more opportunities for criminal groups. As documented by the UN, the unrest also provided cover for elements within the state and its security services to strengthen their control of the drug trade at the expense of independent criminal groups (including Uzbek mafias driven out of the trafficking hub of Osh by the 2010 pogroms).³⁷ Kyrgyzstan's turbulence has also made the country increasingly difficult to govern. Mass protests have twice overthrown governments (in 2005 and again in 2010), but without strong political parties to channel discontent, extreme nationalism and populism have become the major factors driving public participation in politics, something elites have cynically exploited for their own benefit, most damagingly during the 2010 ethnic violence in Osh.³⁸

As it discovered in the aftermath of the Andijon violence, when Tashkent forced it to vacate Karshi-Khanabad, the U.S. faces an uncomfortable trade-off between military exigency and its interest in promoting reforms within Central Asia. Not only did Central Asian leaders see U.S. criticism as inconsistent with their belief that partnership with the United States entailed a guarantee of regime security; they feared that U.S. democracy promotion efforts would actively threaten stability in the region, particularly given the widespread portrayal of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution as the third incarnation (after Georgia and Ukraine) of a democratic wave sweeping the former Soviet Union.³⁹ Washington's response to the Arab Spring has only exacerbated this dilemma in Central Asia. The decision to cast aside longtime allies like former Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak has reinforced the skepticism of Central Asia's authoritarian leaders about the value of any U.S. guarantees. In turn, they have become warier of any cooperation with the U.S. especially if it courts Russian (or Chinese) displeasure.

Even since leaving Karshi-Khanabad in 2005, the U.S. has been unable to press convincingly for the reforms needed to address the region's deep-seated social, economic, and political challenges because of its continued dependence on regime cooperation, especially in connection with the NDN and the war in Afghanistan. Similarly, Washington's willingness to dramatically raise its rent payments for Manas and to enter into nontransparent, potentially toxic fuel contracts with companies controlled by relatives of the Kyrgyz president has made the U.S. complicit in the corruption that threatens Central Asia from within, while making clear that Central Asia's governments have significant leverage over U.S. actions in the region. Nor has the planned withdrawal from Afghanistan so far given the U.S. more freedom to maneuver, since Washington still needs Central Asian buy-in for both the actual withdrawal and for its post-2014 strategy of stabilizing Afghanistan. Even a smaller military presence will, in any case, leave the U.S. vulnerable to manipulation by local elites.⁴⁰

37. UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), "Opiate Flows through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia: A Threat Assessment," May 2012, 72–75, http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghanistan_northern_route_2012_web.pdf.

38. Philip Shishkin, "Central Asia's Crisis in Governance," Asia Society Report, January 2012, http://asiasociety.org/files/pdf/120215_central_asia_crisis_governance.pdf.

39. Shairbek Juraev, "Kyrgyz Democracy: The Tulip Revolution and Beyond," *Central Asian Survey* 27, nos. 3–4 (December 2008): 253–264.

40. See Alexander Cooley, "U.S. Bases and Democratization in Central Asia," *Orbis* 52, no. 2 (Winter 2008): 65–90. A more wide-ranging version of this argument is given by Alexander Cooley, *Base Politics: Democratic Change and the U.S. Military Overseas* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Islamism

All five Central Asian governments point to Islamism as a potential source of instability in the future. They often link the alleged Islamist threat to the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, which, they claim, will again allow extremist groups like al Qaeda to establish a foothold from which to spread their radical ideology across the border into Central Asia and to support homegrown Islamists like the IMU. To be sure, Islamists, some of them violent, have established a presence across Central Asia, including in Kazakhstan, which experienced its first suicide bombings in 2011. Yet the region's governments—not to mention Russia—are wont to overstate the Islamist threat for their own reasons. For Central Asian officials, invoking the jihadist bogeyman is a way of ensuring continued Western interest and assistance after 2014 and justifying their own harsh suppression of dissent. For Moscow, the Islamist specter provides a rationale for seeking a larger regional security role and boosting Russian-sponsored organizations such as the CSTO.⁴¹ Though occasional clashes and incursions along the Tajik-Afghan border have occurred, even the Central Asian governments understand that domestic militant groups have little to do with the Taliban; they fear a Taliban-ruled Afghanistan less than an unstable Afghanistan that provides a safe haven for homegrown militants like the IMU. This fear of instability is what threatens to renew Central Asian support for ethnic Tajik and Uzbek militias in northern Afghanistan after the ISAF withdrawal.

Within Central Asia, the bigger danger is that domestic opposition groups will turn more and more to Islamism as other avenues for influencing politics are closed off. Islamism, especially in its more violent incarnations, has for most of the post-Soviet period found little support in the region. Nevertheless, Islamist groups such as the IMU, the officially nonviolent but intensely anti-Western Hizb-ut-Tahrir, and the South Asian-based Tablighi Jamaat have all attained a foothold, especially in Uzbekistan's share of the Ferghana Valley and across much of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The continuing mix of corruption and repressive government and the growth of radicalism in neighboring Afghanistan and Pakistan threaten to make the problem worse.

In Tajikistan, where the fissures of the civil war lurk just below the surface, the line between extremism and political opposition is often blurred, and Islamism is increasingly becoming the language of opposition even among those hostile to Middle Eastern-style Shari'a law. Fighting broke out in the autumn of 2010 when a group of fighters ambushed a military convoy in the remote Rasht Valley, killing dozens of soldiers. The IMU subsequently claimed responsibility for the ambush, which coincided with the return of the jihadi leader Mullah Abdullo Rakhimov to Tajikistan (Abdullo had fled to Afghanistan in 1997 after rejecting the peace agreement ending the Tajik Civil War; he was eventually killed by Tajik security forces in April 2011).⁴²

Similar factional clashes have become more common recently. While not driven by Islamism as such, this renewed insurgency contributes to the Islamization of opposition politics. As the faction around Rakhmon has consolidated its position in Dushanbe, it has increasingly pushed aside members of the civil war-era opposition, leaving them to join forces with the more

41. Aleksandr Khramchikhin, "Spektr afganskoi voyny," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, August 8, 2011.

42. "Tajikistan: Islamic Militancy No Phantom Menace," Institute for War and Peace Reporting, May 10, 2011, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4dd261921a.html>.

radical IMU and other armed Islamist factions in order to remain politically relevant, even as more and more of the population turns to the language of Islam to channel its grievances with poverty and misrule. The impending withdrawal from Afghanistan also contributes to this unrest by creating a security vacuum and removing a foreign presence that the contending factions believe help preserve a balance between competing groups within the country.⁴³

Even if radical Islamism is unlikely to find widespread support in the near future, misgovernance contributes to the emergence of pockets of extremism within Central Asia. The IMU grew out of an Islamically oriented opposition group from the Ferghana Valley called Adolat (Justice). Similarly, the 2005 unrest in Andijon started when an armed band linked to a local Islamist charitable/self-help group that split off from Hizb-ut-Tahrir attacked a prison where some of its members were being detained. The Andijon group formed as a response to the corruption and poverty plaguing Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, an example of religion providing a platform for social and political mobilization in response to the state's failures.⁴⁴

The emergence of the IMU, the Andijon violence, and the increasing low-level insurgency in Tajikistan are all examples of a vicious circle afflicting Central Asia. Religion becomes a source of support in difficult times, and a refuge from the stifling presence of the state, but governments' oppression of unofficial religious bodies in turn sparks a politicization of religion and, among a small number, radicalization. Indeed, the frequent jailing of Islamists has provided a new path to radicalization, with Central Asian prisons becoming a breeding ground for a new generation of extremists—much as happened in Mubarak's Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East a generation ago. Even government officials acknowledge that prisons have played an important role in boosting the ranks of Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a secretive movement with roots in the Middle East that the Central Asian governments have had particular difficulty combating.⁴⁵ If Central Asia does face a rising tide of jihadism in the years to come, it is more likely to originate in local prisons than in al Qaeda training camps over the border in Afghanistan. That reality gives the United States an interest in working to improve governance in Central Asia, and to combine its pursuit of security cooperation with a greater emphasis on addressing the drivers of extremism.

Central Asia and U.S.-Russia Relations

Even as U.S.-Russian relations have vacillated between cooperation and confrontation in the years since 2001, the war in Afghanistan and the larger struggle against violent extremism has been gener-

43. See "Explainer: Violence in Tajikistan's Badakhshan Province a Legacy of the Civil War," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 26, 2012.

44. Much remains unclear about the Andijon uprising and the precise nature of Akramiya (a name derived from its founder, Akram Yuldashev, that the group itself did not use). For a balanced assessment, see Martha Brill Olcott and Marina Barnett, "The Andijan Uprising, Akramiya and Akram Yuldashev," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 22, 2006, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2006/06/22/andijan-uprising-akramiya-and-akram-yuldashev/1gi>. For an analysis that largely supports the Uzbek government's account, see Ronald Sandee, "The Role of the Akramiya in the May 13, 2005, Unrest in Andijan," NEFA Institute / Hudson Foundation Center for Eurasian Policy Occasional Research Paper, http://www.hudson.org/files/publications/Ronald_Sandee_HT.pdf. For a more skeptical take, see Sarah Kendzior, "Inventing Akromiya: The Role of Uzbek Propagandists in the Andijon Massacre," *Demokratizatsiya* 14, no. 4 (2006): 545–562.

45. International Crisis Group, *Central Asia: Islamists in Prison*, Asia Briefing 97 (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2009), <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/central-asia/B097-central-asia-islamists-in-prison.aspx>.

ally been an area of accord, one that was not wholly disrupted even by the U.S. invasion of Iraq or the Russian invasion of Georgia. Yet Central Asia remains an area of latent strategic competition between Washington and Moscow, and it could emerge after 2014 as one of the most significant challenges to U.S.-Russian cooperation writ large. A renewal of such “Great Game” maneuvering is not, however, in U.S. interests. It threatens to undermine U.S.-Russian cooperation on a range of other issues while encouraging Russia and China to cooperate against the United States at a moment when Washington is seeking to maintain generally positive relations with both in the context of its pivot to the Pacific. Focusing on strategic competition with Moscow would also leave the U.S. less able to address Central Asia’s internal challenges. Regardless of its long-term intentions, Washington’s vagueness about its post-2014 policy toward Central Asia, including the future of its basing policy in the region, is already contributing to a more confrontational U.S.-Russian dynamic.

When the U.S. began its surge into Central Asia shortly after the 9/11 attacks, it did so with the active cooperation of Russia’s new president, Vladimir Putin, who feared the spread of radical Islamism and sought to use cooperation on Afghanistan to reassert Russia’s role as a major power and partner of the United States. Despite misgivings within the Russian security establishment, Putin acquiesced to Washington’s initial decision to station forces in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, offered to share intelligence, and subsequently facilitated the development of the NDN. Yet Russia has always been of two minds about the U.S. presence in Central Asia: On the one hand, it sees U.S. and coalition forces as allies in the fight against radical Islamism, but on the other worries that their presence will change the balance of power in the region and reorient the Central Asian governments away from Russia’s orbit.

In recent years, Russia’s stance has essentially been that U.S. forces must leave Central Asia—but only once the job of stabilizing Afghanistan is complete. Like the Central Asian governments, Russia is hedging against potential post-2014 uncertainties. It worries that the existing Afghan government cannot survive without foreign military backing.⁴⁶ Yet if, in fact, U.S. forces are leaving, Russia does not see any reason for Washington to maintain a military or security presence in Central Asia, which it fears could both contribute to internal disorder and limit Russia’s own ability to protect its interests.

Russian Policy in Central Asia

Russia’s own response, however, has been equally ambiguous. Russia’s most basic aims center on preventing Central Asia from becoming a source of instability affecting Russia itself (especially its Muslim population of between 8 million and 15 million people), curbing drug trafficking, and limiting foreign powers’ political-military influence. Yet in response to a shifting landscape that includes uncertain relations with the United States, a growing Chinese economic presence, and the diverging paths being followed by the different Central Asian states, Russian policy is at times contradictory.

After a long period in which it sought to play off the different Central Asian states to its own advantage, Moscow is increasingly moving toward a strategy of selective integration, boosting ties among a core group of states while pursuing a more limited set of aims elsewhere. This strategy aims at promoting regional economic development as a solution to instability, but also at creating a cohesive, Russia-centric “Eurasia” that can serve as a foundation for Russia’s continued

46. Yuri Paniyev, “Afganistan pereorientiruetsya na sosedei,” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 15, 2012.

great power aspirations.⁴⁷ In Central Asia, this strategy entails deepening economic and political interdependence with Kazakhstan (which can also serve as a buffer zone against instability further south), while seeking enhanced influence in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Moscow is content to largely ignore Turkmenistan as long as it remains stable and officially neutral, but it sees Uzbekistan, which aspires to regional leadership and continues flirting with the United States, as more problematic.⁴⁸ Russia's dilemma lies in seeking to reconcile its aspirations for regional preeminence with its internal and external constraints, as well as the Central Asian governments' own ambivalence about Russian ambitions.

The basis for Russia's integration strategy is a range of multilateral organizations, including the CSTO, the Euro-Asian Economic Community and its Customs Union, and, ultimately, the Eurasian Union that Putin foreshadowed in a preelection essay released in October 2011.⁴⁹ Though such integration projects have been criticized in the West as harkening back to the Russian/Soviet imperial tradition, Russia's motivations are more complicated. Russia sees economic integration as a mechanism for restoring Soviet-era trade links and ensuring a market for Russian goods that would otherwise lose out to foreign (especially Chinese) competition. Political/security integration via the CSTO provides Moscow with an avenue for direct intervention in Central Asia and (at least in theory) limits the scope for the U.S. or NATO to establish a countervailing military presence in the region. As the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan approaches, Russia is also seeking to bolster the Central Asian states' abilities to check cross-border militancy, reportedly concluding agreements in late 2012 to provide Kyrgyzstan with \$1.1 billion and Tajikistan with \$200 million to modernize their militaries.⁵⁰

Russia's major partner in these integration projects is Kazakhstan, which has long promoted post-Soviet political and economic integration as a means of restoring economic links broken by the Soviet collapse, enmeshing itself in a stronger regional economy, and reassuring Moscow that it does not harbor anti-Russian designs (Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbayev first proposed the idea of a Eurasian Union in 1994). The other Central Asian states have been less receptive to Russian overtures, though the vulnerability of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has largely kept them within the Russian multilateral orbit despite their growing economic ties to China. Uzbekistan, which has its own ambitions for regional leadership and fears the possibility of Russian intervention, has been much more skeptical of Russian-led integration efforts. It refused to support the creation of the CSTO Collective Rapid Deployment Force, which it feared would strengthen Moscow's military presence in Central Asia and give Russia a tool for military intervention. For similar reasons, during the December 2011 CSTO summit, Uzbek president Islam Karimov refused to sign an amendment to the group's charter requiring all members to approve the presence of outside military forces on any member's territory (in effect giving Russia the right to veto the presence of U.S. or NATO forces on the territory of any CSTO

47. See Dmitri Trenin, *Post-Imperium: A Eurasian Story* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 13–16, 128.

48. Anna Matveeva, *Selective Engagement: Russia's Future Role in Central Asia*, Central Asia Program Policy Brief 3 (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 2012), http://www.centralasiaprogram.org/images/Policy_Brief_3_July_2012.pdf.

49. Vladimir Putin, "Novyi integratsionnyi proekt dlya Yevrazii: Budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsya segodnya," *Izvestiya*, October 4, 2011.

50. "Kirgiziyu i Tadjikistan vooruzhat rossiiskimi dengami," *Kommersant*, November 6, 2012.

member state).⁵¹ Uzbekistan then suspended its membership in the CSTO entirely in June 2012, a step Russian analysts interpreted as a sign that Tashkent wanted to maintain an American military presence after the withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁵² Not lost on Moscow was the fact that the White House's request for U.S. Foreign Military Financing for Uzbekistan, which had been sharply restricted since Andijon, increased from \$100,000 in fiscal 2012 to \$1.5 million in fiscal 2013 (comparable to what the other Central Asian states receive), a few months before Tashkent suspended its CSTO membership.⁵³

The Central Asian states' ambivalence is one reason these Russian-led integration projects have tended to be less than the sum of their parts, and why the U.S. has been reluctant to engage them. Uzbekistan's skepticism extends to the whole range of Russian-led organizations—in addition to its suspension from the CSTO, Tashkent has also suspended its membership in the Euro-Asian Economic Community and announced that it will not join the Eurasian Union, which it views as wholly unrealistic. Neutral Turkmenistan eschews all these groups as much as possible. At best, the remaining Central Asian states see their participation in the CSTO mainly as a way to ensure good relations with Moscow and to obtain low-cost military equipment (Russia sells some weapons to its CSTO partners at domestic prices). Even Russia vacillates between its declared aspirations to play a leading role in the post-Soviet region and skepticism about its capacity to play such a role. Moscow, and the CSTO, stood by when member state Kyrgyzstan descended into ethnically fueled violence and anarchy in late 2010, despite Bishkek's requests for help.

Russian officials have nevertheless emphasized that the CSTO's role in regional security will grow after the end of combat operations in Afghanistan.⁵⁴ Moscow is urging its CSTO partners to boost the organization's capabilities, especially in the realms of border security, developing the Collective Rapid Deployment Force, and broadening the CSTO's legal scope to address a wider range of contingencies.⁵⁵ Skeptics, however, argue that Moscow has no more stomach for intervening in Central Asia now than it did during the 2010 Osh pogroms, that its efforts to boost the CSTO now are mostly about creating mechanisms to combat domestic dissent, and that non-Central Asian CSTO members Armenia and Belarus would not agree to deploy forces in Central Asia.⁵⁶ In any case, Moscow fears that U.S. actions after 2014 will undermine the effectiveness of the CSTO, especially by encouraging the Central Asians to hedge their commitment to the organization out of a belief that they have other alternatives.

51. "ODKB utochnil obraz vraga: Afganskaya ugroza stala bolee amerikanskoi," *Kommersant*, December 11, 2011.

52. Polina Khimshishvili, "Karimov otkazyvaetsya ukrepyat' svoyu bezopasnost' s pomoshch'yu Rossii," *Vedomosti*, June 29, 2012.

53. U.S. Department of State, "Executive Budget Summary: Function 150 and Other International Programs, Fiscal Year 2013," <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/183755.pdf>. Uzbekistan was an original signatory of the 1992 Collective Security Treaty, but it backed out when Russia sought to institutionalize the treaty into the CSTO in 1999. Tashkent reversed course and joined the CSTO in 2006 following the expulsion of U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad.

54. Vladimir Putin, "Vystupleniya na zasedanii Soveta kollektivnoi bezopasnosti ODKB v rasshirennom sostave," the Kremlin, May 15, 2012, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/15346>.

55. Roger McDermott, "CSTO Prepares for Post-2014 Afghanistan," *CACI Analyst*, July 9, 2012.

56. See Joshua Kucera, "Withdrawal from Afghanistan Could Kill the U.S.-Russia 'Reset,'" *The Atlantic*, October 2011; Yulia Nikitina, "Second Chance for CSTO," Russian International Affairs Council, May 18, 2012, http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=406#top.

For the most part, the U.S. has been agnostic about Russian-led multilateral integration.⁵⁷ It continues to prefer conducting relations with the Central Asian states bilaterally or through regional forums not tied to Russia (e.g., the “Heart of Asia” meetings). It also supports Central Asia’s engagement in all directions, emphasizing that integration with Russia should not preclude economic and political relations with other powers.⁵⁸ The U.S. has been particularly reluctant to see the CSTO as a potential security provider, despite Russian calls for NATO to establish official ties with it. Washington sees the CSTO as both a vehicle for Russian geopolitical ambitions (as evidenced by the December 2011 amendment on foreign bases and official statements criticizing U.S. missile defense plans), and a weak reed for regional security given its inability to do anything in the face of the 2010 Osh violence.⁵⁹ Moscow’s lack of capacity to assume responsibility for Central Asian security, as well as Central Asia’s opposition to remaining in Russia’s exclusive orbit, mean that the U.S. cannot simply outsource regional security to Moscow after 2014 even if it wanted to. Yet Russia does have relationships and capabilities that the U.S. would be foolish to ignore as it seeks tools for maintaining stability in Central Asia following the withdrawal of its combat forces from Afghanistan.

U.S. Strategy in Central Asia and U.S.-Russian Relations

The biggest Central Asian flashpoint between Washington and Moscow is likely to remain the United States’ pursuit of security cooperation with the Central Asian states, especially the status of U.S. military bases in the region. Despite Washington’s repeated assurances that its military presence is temporary and solely directed at prosecuting the war in Afghanistan, Russian officials and strategists remain wary, fearing that the U.S. is using the war as a cover for a broader campaign to limit Russian influence across the former Soviet Union. At the same time, the U.S. presence risks exacerbating rivalries between the Central Asian states, particularly to the extent that the U.S. sees Uzbekistan, or any single state, as the keystone of its post-2014 engagement in the region.

Russia’s assessment of U.S. bases has fluctuated with the overall contours of the U.S.-Russian relationship. When U.S.-Russian relations have been relatively cooperative (as in the aftermath of 9/11 and since the 2009 “reset”), Moscow has tolerated the U.S. military presence; when U.S.-Russian relations have been more polarized, particularly during the period of “colored revolutions” across the former Soviet Union and after Russia’s 2008 invasion of Georgia, Moscow has tended to view the U.S. military presence as a direct threat to its interests and pressed hard for U.S. forces to depart while establishing its own, countervailing military presence. The contest between Washington and Moscow over bases has allowed the Central Asian countries to play the two off of one another, exacerbating mistrust not only between the U.S. and Russia but also within the region. The prospect of enhanced U.S. military assistance after 2014, particularly if it entails the possible deployment of U.S. forces, is likely to boost regional states’ willingness not only to eschew participation in Russian-led structures such as the CSTO but also to aggressively pursue their disputes with neighboring states in ways that could potentially implicate the United States.

57. In late 2012 though, Hillary Clinton noted in a semi-public forum that Russian-led integration projects in Eurasia were “a move to re-Sovietize the region” that the U.S. would seek to “slow down or prevent.” See Bradley Clapper, “Clinton fears efforts to ‘re-Sovietize’ in Europe,” Associated Press, December 6, 2012.

58. Robert Blake, “Interview with al Jazeera, TV Interview,” U.S. Department of State, March 25, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/187005.htm>.

59. “Srednyaya Aziya voz’mët oruzhie vo vtoroye ruki,” *Kommersant*, June 15, 2012.

In February 2009, Kyrgyz president Bakiyev announced that the U.S. had six months to vacate Manas. The announcement came one day after Russian president Dmitry Medvedev visited Bishkek and promised more than \$2 billion in grants and credits, primarily for the completion of the Kambarata-1 dam. As Russia began feeling the bite of the global economic crisis and its ability to come up with the promised funds appeared in doubt, the Kyrgyz authorities let it be known that they would be willing to reconsider the order to close Manas for the right price. By June, Washington and Bishkek had agreed on a deal to triple the rent payments for Manas to \$60 million a year (Russia continued to enjoy access to Kant rent-free) and for Kyrgyzstan to receive more than \$170 million in U.S. assistance.⁶⁰ Bakiyev also signed an agreement in August 2009 allowing Russia to open a second base in Osh (a step strongly opposed by Uzbekistan), but meanwhile was conducting talks with Washington on opening another U.S. facility nearby in Batken. Though Russian officials publicly downplayed the deal to keep Manas open, they were privately livid at what they saw as the Kyrgyz president's double-dealing.⁶¹ Through manipulation of media coverage and fuel supplies, Moscow actively supported Bakiyev's ouster in the face of mass protests in February 2010.

Maintaining Russian influence across the former Soviet Union has been one of the main pillars of Russian foreign policy since the mid-1990s, one that received renewed emphasis under Putin. Russia has been extraordinarily sensitive about relations between its post-Soviet neighbors and outside powers, particularly security cooperation (Georgia's security cooperation with the U.S. and NATO has been the main reason for the poisonous relationship between Moscow and Tbilisi, including the August 2008 war). While Russia has mostly subordinated these concerns in Central Asia to the overriding objective of stabilizing Afghanistan, the prospect of an end to combat operations and Washington's lack of clarity about its post-2014 intentions is increasingly making the issue of U.S. bases in Central Asia an obstacle to sustaining the U.S.-Russian cooperation forged during the course of the war in Afghanistan, and hence to the ability of the U.S. to achieve its strategic objectives after 2014.

U.S. officials have already held consultations with colleagues in several Central Asian states on possible basing and military cooperation after 2014.⁶² By all indications, these consultations have gone furthest with Uzbekistan, which is least susceptible to Russian pressure. Senior officials have meanwhile been vague about U.S. plans or even about what role a U.S. military presence would play.⁶³ The vagueness of Washington's pronouncements has been a source of tension with Moscow, where many believe the U.S. will again view Eurasia as the playing field for a strategic competition with Russia.

Worried that the U.S. is both abandoning Afghanistan to its fate and again trying to sideline Russian influence in the post-Soviet space, Moscow opposes the continued deployment of U.S.

60. Deirdre Tynan, "Kyrgyzstan: U.S. Armed Forces to Remain at Airbase for Afghan Resupply Operations," EurasiaNet, June 22, 2009, <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav062309b.shtml>.

61. Viktoriya Panfilova, "Manas smenil vyvesku," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, June 24, 2009.

62. Daniyar Karimov, "Alternativnyi Dushanbe: Pentagon ishchet zapasnoi aerodrome," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, July 12, 2012; Dan Peleschuk, "While You Weren't Looking," *Russia Profile*, March 15, 2012. Peleschuk cites unnamed U.S. officials as indicating that Washington would seek to prolong its presence at Manas beyond 2014.

63. "Assistant Secretary Blake's Interview by RFE/RL [Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty] on Central Asia," U.S. Department of State, March 9, 2012, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/03/201203222594.html>.

forces to the region after the withdrawal from Afghanistan is complete. A U.S. military presence in any of the Central Asian states would make it difficult for Moscow (or the CSTO) to intervene to restore stability in the event of a crisis. Similarly, Moscow opposes the potential transfer of U.S. weapons to the Central Asian governments. It argues that bolstering the Central Asians' military capacity would increase the likelihood that states in the region will seek to resolve their disputes by force—though a more heavily armed Central Asia would simultaneously be in a stronger position to resist Russian intervention. Moreover, military assistance could become a proxy for Russian and U.S. influence, making it easier for the Central Asian states to play Washington and Moscow off one another, undermining prospects for intraregional cooperation and weakening regional mechanisms like the CSTO that could, in theory, be developed to bolster regional security. Recent national security strategy documents adopted by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan could prove helpful in this regard: Uzbekistan's bans foreign military bases and participation in military blocs, while Kyrgyzstan's affirms the CSTO principle of consensus for any deployment of foreign forces.⁶⁴ Yet because of the mercurial nature of Central Asian politics, such statements cannot necessarily be considered the last word.

One additional consideration affecting Russia's attitude toward a U.S. military presence in Central Asia is Iran. Russian officials worry that any U.S. military forces in Central Asia could become involved in a potential clash between the U.S. and Iran. Many analysts in the region view the recent rapprochement between Washington and Tashkent primarily in light of the potential for a U.S.-Iran conflict.⁶⁵ Moscow worries that U.S. facilities in Central Asia could give Washington a jumping-off point close to Iranian borders, raising the likelihood of a conflict. A U.S. military presence could also open up Central Asia to Iranian retaliation and the spillover effects of a conflict, which could further destabilize an already unstable region and create an opening for Iranian-backed radical groups.⁶⁶ Though Obama administration officials continue to emphasize their commitment to a peaceful resolution of the nuclear standoff with Tehran, the end of combat operations in Afghanistan and the prospect that Iran will soon reach the enrichment and technical thresholds for producing nuclear weapons continues to raise fears about future U.S. actions across the region, especially given the uncertainty about Israeli intentions and the resultant possibility that the U.S. could be drawn into a conflict it did not sanction.

Toward a New Silk Road

Washington's strategy for Central Asia and Afghanistan after 2014 centers on leaving behind a "New Silk Road"—integrating the region into a continent-wide web of trade, transit, and communications links. The goal, as articulated by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and other senior U.S. officials, is to link Afghanistan and its neighbors to the booming economies of South Asia, which in turn will help attract foreign investment, open up new sources of raw materials, and give regional actors a stake in economic development that will turn them away from violence and extremism.⁶⁷

64. On Uzbekistan, see Zabikhullah S. Saipov, "New Foreign Policy Strategy Paper Codifies Uzbekistan's Reluctance Toward Restrictive Alliances," *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 10, 2012; on Kyrgyzstan, see Roger McDermott, "Kyrgyzstan's National Security Concept Legally Enshrines Strategic Balance," *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 6, 2012.

65. Viktoriya Panfilova, "Uzbekistan vozvrashchaetsya k SShA," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, July 4, 2012.

66. See Viktoriya Panfilova, "V Tsentral'noi Azii opasayutsya ataki na Iran: Kigiziya uzhe vytesnyaet amerikantsev iz 'Manasa,'" *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 1, 2012.

67. Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks at the New Silk Road Ministerial Meeting," U.S. Department of State, September 22, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/09/173807.htm>. For a more detailed

While this strategy aims above all at making Afghanistan economically and politically viable after the departure of foreign forces, Central Asia could also reap important benefits. As Central Asia's Soviet-era economies were focused on providing raw materials for industrial production in Russia and the western USSR, connections with its eastern and southern neighbors remain comparatively underdeveloped. Less than 7 percent of Afghanistan's foreign trade was conducted with the five Central Asian countries in 2010, despite geographic proximity and historical-cultural links.⁶⁸ Though its economies are much smaller than those of India and Pakistan (not to mention China), the Central Asian states represent an untapped economic resource for Afghanistan. Moreover, given widespread poverty and concerns about future stability within the region, Central Asia also stands to benefit from opportunities to boost trade with its neighbors to the south.

Building on existing initiatives such as the EU's Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia, and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) development program underwritten by the Asian Development Bank, Washington envisions the construction and expansion of infrastructure linking Central and South Asia via Afghanistan, including energy transmission lines, roads, railways, pipelines, and fiber-optic cables (the State Department has identified more than 40 infrastructure projects that could form the backbone of a New Silk Road).⁶⁹ The U.S. vision also aims to take advantage of the agreements negotiated to facilitate the NDN to boost the "soft infrastructure" of border crossings, customs and tariff agreements, and procedures for battling cross-border crime and corruption needed to sustain the regional economic integration fostered by the war.

For now, however, such agreements as exist operate only in the context of the NDN, and their postwithdrawal future is very much in doubt.⁷⁰ These agreements, which run counter to the general pattern of distrust among the states of Central Asia, owe much to the strong push given by the United States as it sought to establish the NDN, as well as to the efforts of the CAREC funding organizations to promote regional trade and boost living standards across the region. Yet even the NDN has contributed to Central Asia's misgovernance, providing a new source of rents that has exacerbated corruption, while in practice doing little to lower barriers to cross-border trade.⁷¹ Whether even this level of intraregional cooperation can endure in the absence of an active U.S. military presence and sustained U.S. focus on the conflict in Afghanistan, however, remains an open question. The record of regional economic cooperation outside the context of the NDN does not provide much basis for hope.

Washington's New Silk Road strategy is also driven by a set of broader geopolitical considerations. Ever since the idea of creating a New Silk Road emerged in the 1990s (the U.S. Congress considered the first Silk Road Strategy Act in 1999, while Clinton administration officials dis-

presentation, see Robert D. Hormats, "The United States' 'New Silk Road' Strategy: What Is It? Where Is It Headed?" U.S. Department of State, September 29, 2011, <http://www.state.gov/e/rls/rmk/2011/174800.html>.

68. European Commission, "Afghanistan: Main Economic Indicators," 2011, <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/html/114134.htm>.

69. Joshua Kucera, "Central Asia: Can Expanded Trade Pacify an Unsettled Region?" *EurasiaNet*, October 31, 2011, <http://www.eurasianet.org/print/64419>.

70. For analysis of this point, see Andrew C. Kuchins, Thomas M. Sanderson, and David A. Gordon, *The Northern Distribution Network and the Modern Silk Road: Planning for Afghanistan's Future* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 2009), 21–29. On U.S. policy, see Susan Elliott, "Remarks at the Northern Distribution Network Conference," U.S. Department of State, May 8, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2012/189499.htm>.

71. Graham Lee, *The New Silk Road and the Northern Distribution Network: A Golden Road to Central Asian Trade Reform?* Occasional Paper 8 (New York: Open Society Foundations Central Eurasia Project, 2012), 18–20.

cussed it even earlier, though the focus then was on connecting Central Asia to the Caucasus and Europe, rather than to South Asia), the strategy has centered on promoting trade between Central Asia and U.S. allies as a means of boosting regional states' sovereignty and checking the influence of Russia and China.⁷² That motivation has contributed to Russian opposition and fed the increasingly competitive dynamic that has made Central Asia into a source of rivalry among the region's major powers. For much of the past two decades, competition has centered on energy pipelines from the Caspian Sea Basin, with Washington and Moscow contending to determine the route of any new transit infrastructure and pursuing the political influence it entails.

Today, thanks to the growing U.S. partnership with India, which many U.S. strategists see as a democratic counterweight to China in the Asia-Pacific region, Washington is pressing to link Afghanistan and Central Asia specifically to South Asia, even though the region's most important economic partner is not India but China. As much as possible, the U.S. is also trying to prevent Iran from participating in the new trade relationships it is promoting (and indeed, to exclude Iran from discussions about stabilizing post-2014 Afghanistan altogether). Washington's dual goals of stabilizing Central Asia through economic integration and limiting Russian/Chinese/Iranian influence are, however, mutually incompatible. Simple geography dictates that Central Asia's integration with global markets requires improved trade and investment ties with all its neighbors, particularly those such as Russia and China that already enjoy competitive advantages in the Central Asian market, the more so as, in the words of a former senior official at the World Bank and CAREC, the New Silk Road "represents a vision and call to action rather than a well-articulated and organized strategy," one to which the U.S. and Europeans are unwilling to contribute substantial new resources.⁷³

Given resource constraints facing the U.S. and its allies, the goal is for new infrastructure projects to be self-sustaining and to be driven primarily by the private sector. U.S. officials have taken the lead in bringing together private investors, multilateral development banks, and neighboring countries to support projects designed to link Afghanistan to global markets. Some of the resulting infrastructure, such as the rail line between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan or the CASA-1000 energy transmission grid, is already in place or under construction. More ambitious projects like the TAPI pipeline, which U.S. officials frequently tout, remain in the planning stages, with their future heavily dependent on political developments that will in turn influence investment decisions. Inevitably though, regional states—especially China—will be the source of much funding for any new projects, which in turn will give them a greater say in what those projects ultimately look like.

China and Alternative Silk Road Visions

Already, the most ambitious infrastructure projects emerging in the region are those linking Central Asia to China and East Asia, rather than to South Asia or to Europe. These roads, railways, and pipelines all underpin China's growing economic and cultural presence in the region, and they

72. 106th Congress, "Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999," H.R. 1152, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/106/hr1152/text>. The act was passed by the House of Representatives but died in the Senate. An updated version was introduced, but not adopted, in 2006.

73. Johannes F. Linn, "Central Asian Regional Integration and Cooperation: Reality or Mirage?" *EDB Eurasian Integration Yearbook 2012* (Almaty: Eurasian Development Bank, 2012), 106.

are likely to have a more enduring impact on Central Asia's long-term development than either the war in Afghanistan or Russia's push for regional integration. This new infrastructure and the web of economic relationships it underpins represent a variant of the Silk Road vision promoted by the United States, but one whose aim is much broader than merely stabilizing Afghanistan.

This vision presents a dilemma for the United States. On one hand, it bolsters Washington's aim of promoting transcontinental trade through Central Asia and making the region economically self-sustaining. On the other hand, it is agnostic about Afghanistan, while tying Central Asia ever more tightly to Beijing and avoiding completely the link between assistance and political reform that characterizes Western aid and investment projects. Though Chinese political aims in Central Asia remain modest for now, the evolving economic relationship also creates a basis for a stronger Chinese political role in the future.

Infrastructure and trade are the foundations of China's push into Central Asia. Beijing has already financed and constructed an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan (including an extension to the major oil-producing regions of the Caspian Sea), as well as a large gas pipeline from Turkmenistan across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China's western province of Xinjiang. This pipeline broke the Russian stranglehold over Turkmen gas exports that had existed since the Soviet collapse (China now imports more Turkmen gas than Russia does).⁷⁴ In the process, it boosted Turkmenistan's market power and geopolitical autonomy, long a key goal of U.S. policy. China is also pressing for the construction of new railroads into Central Asia. These include a proposed line across Kyrgyzstan that would link to Uzbekistan's rail network and thence to existing transcontinental lines to Europe (though this project has encountered significant resistance in Kyrgyzstan, which fears the growing Chinese hold on its economy). In 2011, China completed a new rail line to Kazakhstan, forming part of the so-called Second Eurasian Land Bridge, a transcontinental railway that now leads from the manufacturing centers on China's east coast through Central Asia and Russia to markets in Europe. Beijing is also a major funder of CAREC through the Asian Development Bank. Indeed, CAREC's long-term strategy for regional development (formalized in the October 2012 Wuhan Action Plan) envisions the construction of six major transport corridors running from ports on China's east coast across Central Asia to points further west.

This new infrastructure underpins growing economic and political ties between China and all five Central Asian states. Trade with all five has expanded several-fold just since the turn of the millennium, reaching a total of more than \$39 billion in 2011 (compared with \$16.5 billion between the five Central Asian states and Russia). The volume of Chinese trade with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan has surpassed Russian trade with these countries.⁷⁵ Chinese direct investment has also surged, even as Russian investment has been constrained by the financial crisis and lower oil prices. The total stock of Chinese foreign direct investment in the five Central Asian states totaled more than \$2.9 billion in 2010, slightly less than Russia's total of \$3.17 billion, but significantly higher in both Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and only slightly lower in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.⁷⁶

74. Bruce Pannier, "New Turkmen-China Pipeline Breaks Russia's Hold Over Central Asian Gas," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, December 14, 2009.

75. International Monetary Fund, "Direction of Trade Statistics," <http://elibrary-data.imf.org/FindDataReports.aspx?d=33061&e=170921>.

76. Department of Outward Investment and Economic Cooperation, China Ministry of Commerce, "2010 Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment," <http://hzs.mofcom.gov.cn/accessory/201109/1316069658609.pdf>; Central Bank of the Russian Federation, "Pryamyie investitsii iz

Much of this investment is concentrated in natural resource extraction companies, but is gradually expanding into other sectors. In October 2005, the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) purchased Petrokazakhstan from the Kazakh government for \$4.18 billion, beating out Russia's Lukoil by paying significantly more than most observers thought the company was worth. In April 2009 CNPC also paid \$2.6 billion for half of Kazakhstan's MangistauMunaiGaz, one of the major gas producers in Kazakhstan's sector of the Caspian Basin. The China Development Bank, meanwhile, loaned Turkmenistan more than \$4 billion to develop the massive South Yolotan gas field and provided the funding (\$6.7 billion) for the construction of the Kazakh section of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline. China is also investing in upgrading Tajik highways and electricity grids throughout the region, and in sectors ranging from mining to petrochemicals to telecommunications.⁷⁷

Both through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and at the bilateral level, Chinese aid is designed to promote stability and a pro-Beijing political orientation rather than reform or democratization.⁷⁸ China is also using its growing economic leverage to shape regional politics. Beijing is pressing for the SCO to take on a larger role, both in the region itself and (rhetorically at least) in promoting Afghan reconstruction.⁷⁹ It has promoted a largely Chinese-financed SCO development bank and has even called for the formation of an SCO free trade area, both of which would dramatically strengthen China's economic presence in Central Asia at Russian expense.⁸⁰ China is also boosting bilateral security cooperation with some of the Central Asian states, especially Uzbekistan.⁸¹ The emphasis of China's SCO and bilateral security engagement remains fighting against the "three evils" of terrorism, extremism, and separatism (as well as transnational threats)—all of which the Central Asian governments see as imperiling their own security as well. Nevertheless, security cooperation within the SCO has stalled, in large measure because of mutual suspicion between Russia and China, the Central Asians' mistrust of Chinese motives, and Chinese reluctance to get involved in primarily Central Asian issues such as water sharing or institutional reform.

The U.S. will need to accommodate itself to China playing a larger role in Central Asia, given the reality of Chinese proximity and investment capital. China's approach to regional development is not necessarily contrary to U.S. goals in Central Asia, and indeed, Washington views China as an important component of its New Silk Road vision (e.g., the U.S. is providing some of the funding for the Wuhan Action Plan). Balancing between Russia and China gives the Central Asian states a greater degree of strategic independence than they enjoyed in the first post-Soviet years. Yet China's prominence does create certain challenges. In the longer term, it reduces the pressure on governments to reform. Central Asian governments may welcome this lack of conditional-

Rossiiskoi federatsii za granitsu po sostoyaniyu na 1 yanvarya 2010g. i 1 yanvarya 2011 g.," http://www.cbr.ru/statistics/print.aspx?file=credit_statistics/dir-inv_out_country.htm&pid=svs&sid=ITM_58823.

77. For an overview, see Yevgeniya Korniyenko and Toshiaki Sakatsume, *Chinese Investment in the Transition Countries*, Working Paper 107 (London: European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2009).

78. Alexander Cooley, "The New Great Game in Central Asia: Geopolitics in a Post-Western World," *Foreign Affairs*, August 7, 2012.

79. "Hu Asks SCO Members to Unite against Security Challenges," Xinhua, June 6, 2012; Christopher Bodeen, "Central Asian Group Seeks Bigger Afghanistan Role," Associated Press, June 6, 2012; "Security Cooperation Is SCO's Shining Point," *China Daily*, April 13, 2012.

80. "Wen Calls for SCO Development Bank," Xinhua, November 26, 2010. Kyrgyzstan formally advanced the development bank proposal at the 2012 SCO summit in Beijing.

81. Richard Weitz, "Uzbekistan's Growing Role in Beijing's Central Asian Strategy," *China Brief* 11, no. 1 (January 14, 2011): 12–15.

ity, but even they worry about the possibility of a popular backlash against Chinese development projects that seem to benefit Chinese companies and imported Chinese workers more than the local economy. Moreover, political elites in much of Central Asia fear that the changing trade and investment patterns threaten to replace Russia's historical dominance of the region with China's.⁸²

While Chinese investment can help address Central Asia's persistent underdevelopment, the United States has an interest in ensuring that China's growing role in the region does not develop into the kind of neocolonial dominance once exercised by Russia, nor preclude Central Asia's ability to forge economic and political links in multiple directions, including with Europe, South Asia, and the Middle East. Uncertainty about U.S. staying power after 2014 is, however, a significant problem, especially since the U.S. vision requires Washington to play a robust coordinating role that it appears reluctant to take on.⁸³

Implications for U.S. Policy

The impending withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan changes both the nature and the extent of U.S. interests in Central Asia. First, the U.S. will no longer have to view its interests primarily through the lens of the war. In other words, the United States will be able to have a more multifaceted, forthright relationship with its partners in Central Asia, one that includes a greater focus on the sources of instability within the region itself. Second, Central Asia will no longer be as *central*, at least as far as U.S. interests are concerned. While the U.S. will remain an interested party after 2014, the withdrawal of U.S. forces, coupled with the two other main trends in U.S. security policy—namely, the rebalancing toward the Pacific and significant cuts to the military budget—will allow the forces of history and geography to reassert themselves. Regional powers such as Russia, China, and perhaps in the longer run India and Iran will all play a more prominent role in Central Asia. Regional economic integration (not necessarily of the sort favored by Moscow) will increasingly enmesh Central Asia into an emerging Eurasian web of exchange, regardless of U.S. policy. To the extent that this integration bolsters development and stability in Central Asia, and is pursued voluntarily, it does not run counter to U.S. interests. The U.S. will still, however, have an important role to play. An active U.S. presence ensures the Central Asians' strategic autonomy between Russia and China, and represents the best hope for promoting domestic reform inside the region.

Of course, the U.S. has the option of trying to outsource regional security to Moscow (Beijing is hardly interested in taking on this burden), whether through the CSTO or by merely acknowledging that Central Asia falls in a Russian sphere of influence. In a world of war fatigue and tightening budgets, this approach holds a certain appeal. Yet Moscow clearly lacks both the desire and the capability to address all the security challenges that Central Asia faces, some of which have potentially direct implications for the United States. Russia's approach to regional integration, as embodied by the CSTO and the Eurasian Union, is partial at best (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan at least have little interest in either) and of questionable efficacy. China's interests,

82. Sébastien Peyrouse, *Central Asia's Growing Partnership with China*, Working Paper 4 (Madrid: EU-Central Asia Monitoring, 2009), 9–10.

83. For a skeptical take, see Steve LeVine, "New Afghan Exit Strategy: When in Doubt, Call It the New Silk Road," *Foreign Policy*, November 7, 2011, http://oilandglory.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/11/06/new_afghan_exit_strategy_when_in_doubt_call_it_the_new_silk_road.

meanwhile, are limited to establishing economic linkages (especially accessing raw materials) and ensuring that Central Asia does not become a zone of instability threatening its own western borderlands. Neither Russia nor China has much interest in political reform. Though Moscow and Beijing increasingly see one another as rivals in Central Asia, they both favor a hands-off approach to domestic issues and would prefer to see U.S. influence contained as much as possible. The U.S. cannot bear the sole burden for Central Asia's stability, but nor consequently can it assign that role entirely to others.

Key Elements for a Transitional U.S. Strategy

As the U.S. transitions out of Afghanistan over the next few years, the key elements of its strategy in Central Asia should include the following.

Ensuring a Sustained U.S. Commitment

Because recent U.S. engagement has been driven by the war in Afghanistan, once the war (or at least the direct U.S. role in it) is over, Central Asia will cease to be a first-order, or even second-order, priority for the United States. Concerns about U.S. staying power in Afghanistan are already leading states across the region to hedge their bets. While Washington will have more pressing interests elsewhere, including in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific, it needs to avoid the temptation to turn its back on Central Asia. With Central Asia's own future increasingly in doubt, the United States needs to—publicly and privately—emphasize that its interests in Central Asia are enduring, and that it will remain engaged at multiple levels even after its combat troops have left Afghanistan.

Even though U.S. priorities are shifting at the global level, Washington will continue to have important interests at stake in Central Asia that require sustained engagement. These include preventing the emergence of failed states that could become a staging ground for international terrorism, avoiding regional conflicts that could draw in neighboring powers (many of them with nuclear weapons), and limiting Central Asia's ability to act as a transit route for transnational threats such as drugs. Moreover, having entrée to Central Asia enhances U.S. ability to influence developments in Afghanistan—as well as Pakistan—which both face worsening insurgencies and the growth of radical forces.

As a nonregional power, the United States is not viewed as a threat by most of the Central Asian regimes, which is a key reason they welcome a strong U.S. role. The U.S. should make clear its commitment to remain engaged after 2014, while announcing that it will in return emphasize concrete progress on political and economic reform. Convincing the Central Asian governments, as well as other regional powers, that the U.S. will maintain its focus on the region after 2014 will not be easy, especially in an era of tight budgets and military cutbacks. The optics are already bad. U.S. appropriations for its Central Asia policy have declined from \$328 million in 2002 to \$96 million in 2013.⁸⁴

Apart from simply repeating the message that it will remain engaged, the U.S. should develop a concrete agenda for the next stage in its relationship with the region, and ensure that it is adequately funded. This agenda should include working toward World Trade Organization accession for the four states apart from Kyrgyzstan that remain outside; creating a new regional counter-

84. Ross Wilson, "U.S. Policy in Central Asia," Testimony to U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, July 24, 2012.

narcotics framework; and advancing regional economic cooperation, using the carrot of security assistance to generate buy-in from skeptical governments. It should also identify additional steps the Central Asian states can take to support the transition in Afghanistan via the so-called Istanbul Process, both to reassure the Central Asian governments that the transition remains on track and to push back against their increasing unilateralism. Washington should also commit to maintaining the annual bilateral consultations that it has initiated with each of the five Central Asian states, and which have become the main forum for regular high-level dialogue.

Seeking Pragmatic Cooperation with Russia

One of the most damaging outcomes of the withdrawal from Afghanistan could be a renewed U.S.-Russian strategic competition in Central Asia, which could in turn become a serious obstacle to further U.S.-Russian cooperation more generally. Instead, the U.S. will have to figure out how to work as collaboratively as possible with Russia in Central Asia, while giving Moscow an opening to play a constructive role in regional security. Prioritizing cooperation with Moscow will impose some constraints on Washington's ability to pursue extensive bilateral security cooperation with the Central Asian states. Not only is U.S.-Russian cooperation in Central Asia a necessary condition for addressing the region's problems; it is also imperative for keeping the overall U.S.-Russian relationship on track, helping to prevent a Russo-Chinese condominium in Central Asia that could also have implications for U.S. strategy in East Asia and the Pacific, and limiting opportunities for Central Asian leaders to extort higher payments by playing the U.S. and Russia off one another.

To be sure, Russia would prefer to keep U.S. influence in Central Asia to a minimum. At the same time, however, it worries about the impact of growing Chinese economic and political power, and in the long run stands to benefit from a more pluralistic strategic environment that preserves its own freedom of action. In contrast to the situation in Ukraine, Belarus, or even the Caucasus, moreover, distance alone means that the U.S. will never be a real threat to Russian influence in Central Asia. The challenges facing Washington and Moscow in the region are also essentially the same, including the growth of radicalism, the drug trade, and the potential for conflict either within or between states. U.S.-Russian cooperation in Central Asia is in the interest of both countries, but ensuring it requires both to adopt a more realistic perspective on the challenges they each face.

With its strategy of limited integration, Russia has ceased viewing the entirety of Central Asia as part of its own sphere of influence. Nevertheless, Moscow remains extraordinarily sensitive about threats to its own security emanating from the region. It also retains a limited capacity as a security provider that the U.S. should seek to leverage. The U.S. should therefore both ensure that its own plans for military cooperation are not seen as undermining Russian interests and also, to the extent possible, seek to cooperate with Moscow to address common threats. This approach would both avoid adding another source of tension to the U.S.-Russian relationship and help reduce the likelihood of extensive Russo-Chinese cooperation in the region directed at shutting out a U.S. influence.

First, the U.S. needs to minimize the chances that its plans for postwar military deployments in the region are viewed as a threat to Russian security interests. Post-2014 security cooperation in Central Asia should be a primary subject of discussion in U.S.-Russian conversations. Discussion should focus both on promoting transparency about Washington's own post-2014 plans (including the future of Manas and other potential deployments) and on developing an active agenda for cooperation on issues such as drug trafficking and counterterrorism. Such transparency runs counter to the U.S. military's preference for ambiguity, which lessens the potential for popular opposition

to a U.S. presence. Yet in Central Asia, popular opposition represents less of a threat to U.S. interests than does the prospect of renewed strategic competition with Moscow.

U.S.-Uzbek relations could be a particular flashpoint. Tashkent has been more eager than its neighbors to pursue security cooperation with the U.S., largely as a means of balancing against Russian influence. Yet Russia's consolidation of ties with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan at both the bilateral and multilateral levels (including new military assistance to Bishkek and Dushanbe), coupled with Uzbekistan's determination to maintain its distance, are already deepening the region's geopolitical fragmentation. A U.S. security presence in Uzbekistan after 2014, especially one backed by arms sales to Tashkent, would deepen that fragmentation, and potentially make the U.S. itself a player in any cross-border crises. Washington has good reason for wanting to maintain at least a limited ability to deploy forces to Central Asia, but it needs to do so in ways that do not exacerbate the region's polarization. It therefore needs to cultivate ties not just with Uzbekistan but also with its neighbors, and to do so as much as possible in consultation with Moscow (and in the longer term, possibly with a more effective CSTO as well). While it cannot allow Russia a veto over its operations in Central Asia, the U.S. should be solicitous of Russian concerns, encourage both Russia and the CSTO to play a more constructive role, and avoid as much as possible tying itself to any one state in post-2014 Central Asia. The U.S. should also encourage constructive Russian steps, such as training and equipping Central Asian security forces and playing a larger role in protecting the Tajik-Afghan border.

Central Asian security should therefore be a high-priority topic for future U.S.-Russian discussions. Talks should commence, perhaps initially in the context of the military security working group of the Bilateral Presidential Commission but also on the part of high-level State Department and Defense Department officials. Moreover, the U.S. should be open to working directly with Moscow to address mutual security concerns. Focusing on Central Asian security would ensure an agenda for positive cooperation following the success of the New START agreement and the deadlock on missile defense cooperation. Particular areas of emphasis could include border security, training of security forces, and counternarcotics. Russia has been particularly concerned about Central Asia's role as a transit route for Afghan narcotics, which also creates serious challenges for U.S. allies in Europe and South Asia and is a principal threat to the long-term stability of Central Asia itself. Nevertheless, Russia has opposed U.S. plans for a regional counternarcotics program (the Central Asian Counternarcotics Initiative), to which Moscow was not invited to participate. The U.S. should therefore be open to a broader regional initiative that includes Russia as well as Central Asia, Afghanistan, and other states in the region to develop a new approach to trafficking. Given the reluctance of the Central Asian states to work together without outside initiative and their history of playing Moscow and Washington off one another, such a program could also be an important impetus to maintaining cooperation within the region.

Keeping the Post-2014 U.S. Military Presence in the Region to a Minimum—and Spreading It Out

Part of the reason Central Asia threatens to become a source of renewed confrontation between Washington and Moscow is Russian concerns about the size and nature of the post-2014 U.S. military presence in the region. The U.S. has exacerbated these concerns with its lack of clarity regarding the size, duration, and role of any potential deployments. Not only should the U.S. be more forthcoming about what it intends; it should also ensure that whatever agreements it does sign with both the Central Asian states and Afghanistan are as limited as possible while remaining consistent

with ensuring Afghanistan's long-term stability. Not only is a larger, more permanent U.S. presence likely to antagonize Russia (and China); it will also perpetuate the dependence on Central Asia's governments that has prevented the U.S. from making a serious push for reform over the past decade. As its history with Manas shows, a significant U.S. military presence is an inducement to corruption and an invitation to being manipulated by Central Asian elites. Rather than permanent deployments, the U.S. should focus on contingency access agreements, which would allow it to surge forces into Central Asian facilities in the event of unforeseen crises either within the region or in neighboring South Asia. At the same time, the U.S. should avoid becoming overly reliant on any one partner in the region. This means securing agreements with multiple states to ensure that the U.S. will continue to have options, and to limit the ability of any one state to demand excessive financial or political backing in exchange for its cooperation.

Focusing on Governance Inside Central Asia

The end of combat operations in Afghanistan, and with it, of U.S. dependence on Central Asian transit routes, gives the U.S. greater leverage in its relations with the Central Asian states. It should use the opportunity to focus more intently on domestic and regional problems, something that it has been reluctant to do for fear of interrupting security cooperation, especially since the expulsion of U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad in 2005. If anything, the Central Asian governments are now more interested in having a robust U.S. presence because of their concerns about instability (both domestic and across the border in Afghanistan), giving the U.S. a stronger platform to push for domestic reform as part of its engagement strategy.

In particular, U.S. engagement should focus on improving governance—ranging from tax collection, to social services, to judicial and security sector reform—preventing state failure, and boosting intraregional trade. Unlike an explicit focus on democratization, which existing Central Asian governments are unlikely to welcome and which could become a source of needless tension with Moscow and Beijing, emphasizing governance will give the U.S. an opening to focus on some of the domestic sources of instability. At the regional level, the focus should be on easing cross-border movement, trade and visa liberalization, and regulatory harmonization. Within individual states, engagement should not be limited to governments. Where possible, the U.S. should also work more extensively with civil society—including religious leaders, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations—to help them build capacity and fill in the gaps where the state does not reach. International organizations already active in the region—especially the European Union (much of whose aid is already targeted on improving the investment climate and lowering barriers to trade), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the United Nations Development Program—should also play a role. The situation is most urgent in Tajikistan, where much of the country is already beyond the writ of the central government and where militancy (political as well as jihadist) is growing. Russia, with its military and security presence in Tajikistan, should also be invited to contribute to these efforts.

Being Realistic about the New Silk Road

The concept of the New Silk Road represents the most promising avenue for bringing Central Asia's economies and governments into the 21st century. Yet the United States' rhetoric has not been matched by its actions. Washington's emphasis on removing bureaucratic obstacles to trade (e.g.,

improved border crossings and harmonization of customs codes) and encouraging private-sector initiative is having a concrete impact, but not on the scale necessary to overcome the ingrained mistrust and corruption that continues to limit trade within and across the region. Meanwhile, a focus on infrastructure projects (for which funding may not even materialize) risks exacerbating the problems of corruption and rent-seeking on the part of local elites while doing nothing to promote sustainable foreign investment. Even CAREC has failed to get buy-in from top-level leaders in Central Asia or to overcome entrenched distrust between states in the region.⁸⁵ To many observers, the New Silk Road has become little more than a slogan designed to show the Central Asians and Afghans that the U.S. has a plan for the region after the withdrawal of its combat forces.

Given financial and bureaucratic obstacles, the New Silk Road as portrayed by the Obama administration appears unrealistic. Nevertheless, the U.S. could do more to promote regional economic integration. It will, however, have to shift its focus from highly visible infrastructure projects to less glamorous but more necessary intergovernmental agreements on lowering barriers to trade. It will also have to accept the geographic and economic logic dictating that Central Asia's future integration with the global economy will take place primarily through China, and to a lesser degree, Russia and Iran.

To the extent that the U.S. and its allies have a role to play in this process, it is primarily through "soft infrastructure" development, such as improving border crossing procedures and rationalizing customs codes. Central Asia's patrimonial political culture, as well as the mistrust between the five states and their leaders, is in many ways the biggest obstacles. Yet the relative success of the NDN shows that these barriers are not entirely insuperable. While the U.S. has so far been unable to build on the NDN agreements to establish a more durable framework for regional trade, it should continue its efforts in this direction.⁸⁶ Lowering barriers to economic cooperation across the region in the context of a renewed focus on improving governance should be a key priority of Washington's post-2014 engagement. At the same time, the U.S. can do more to promote international private-sector involvement in exchange for steps to improve the investment climate.

While hard infrastructure (especially roads and railways) does need improvement, it should take a back seat as a focus of U.S. policy for the time being, since the major obstacles to economic integration are less physical than political.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, China's role as a funder and builder of infrastructure should be broadly welcomed, even if the resulting trade patterns differ from those envisioned by the New Silk Road concept, and do little in the short term to advance U.S. reform objectives. To the extent that the main threats to Central Asia's future lie within the region itself rather than in Moscow or Beijing, the U.S. should support any developments that boost legitimate economic activity. The challenge will be balancing support for China's role in the development of Central Asia's economy while working to limit the resulting political dependence and continuing to promote reforms that address the internal sources of Central Asia's instability.

85. Lin, "Central Asian Regional Integration," 111–113.

86. The Russian-sponsored Customs Union may alleviate some of these problems for its members, but it could exacerbate them vis-à-vis the outside world (including nonmember Uzbekistan and Afghanistan).

87. See, especially, S. Frederick Starr and Andrew C. Kuchins, *The Key to Success in Afghanistan: A Modern Silk Road Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia–Caucasus Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, May 2010), <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1005Afghan.pdf>.

Succeeding—or at Least Not Failing—in Afghanistan

Even if fears that post-2014 chaos in Afghanistan will spill over into Central Asia are exaggerated, developments in one will necessarily have an impact in the other. An Afghanistan that descends into renewed civil strife will continue being a source of drugs and will make it more difficult to secure Tajikistan in particular against its nascent insurgency. Moreover, the prospect of state failure in Afghanistan and/or a return to power by the Taliban is already exacerbating the jockeying for advantage among Afghanistan's neighbors, raising the likelihood of a broader international struggle in the future. Washington is damaging its credibility in the region, not to mention with Moscow and Beijing, by pursuing unachievable objectives and an unrealistic timeline in its efforts to transition to a postconflict Afghanistan.

Few observers in Central Asia believe the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan has been a success. They fear, moreover, that the withdrawal of foreign combat forces will make a bad situation worse. If it wants Afghanistan's neighbors, including the Central Asians, to buy into its vision of the future, Washington needs to reassure them that the Afghanistan it leaves behind is on a stable, sustainable path to the future—or at the very least that it is not an entirely lost cause. This will mean committing sufficient resources to stave off economic collapse and ensuring continued, substantial support for Afghanistan's security forces far beyond 2014.⁸⁸ As long as states in the region doubt Washington's commitment to Afghanistan, they will continue to pursue uncoordinated, at times incompatible, strategies and will prefer to view Russia and China as the main pillars of regional security. Simply put, the United States cannot hope to remain an important player in Central Asia if regional elites continue to believe that it will leave Afghanistan to its fate after 2014.

88. For a more detailed analysis of what the U.S. must do to ensure a sustainable transition, see Anthony H. Cordesman, "Six Conditions for an Effective Transfer of Power in Afghanistan," CSIS Report, September 2012, <http://csis.org/publication/six-conditions-effective-transfer-power-afghanistan>.



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