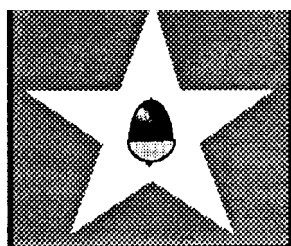


Conflict Studies Research Centre

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**Russia, The USA
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There is significant unease in Russia about the American presence in Central Asia, despite President Putin's support for it. While the Central Asian states welcome the opportunity to pursue a less Moscow-centred foreign policy, Russia and the regional relationships it has developed over the last decade will remain a major factor in the region in the long term. The geopolitical fears of Putin's opponents are therefore exaggerated.

This paper will discuss the Russian Federation's relations with the five states of Central Asia since "9-11" and the ensuing war on terrorism, which has transformed both Russia's relationship with the USA, and the USA's relationship with Central Asia. The "American factor" has thus become an important feature of the Russian relationship with her Central Asian partners.

Relations Before 11 September 2001

Former Soviet Central Asia has, like other parts of the former Soviet Union, been seen by Russia since 1991 as a sphere where Russian interests should predominate, and where the interests of powers outside the former Soviet Union should be kept to a minimum. Moscow's ideal was to have these states oriented around a Russian hub. Immediately following the break up of the former Soviet Union, the Central Asian states themselves put great emphasis on close ties with Moscow, and almost seemed reluctant to assume the mantle of independence that was effectively imposed upon them in 1991. However, over the course of the decade the larger states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan sought to broaden their foreign policy orientations. The weakness of Russian economic and military power, however, has made it extremely difficult for Moscow to prevent these states from developing foreign policy orientations away from Moscow, and political, economic and military ties with other powers. Moscow's main competitors for influence have been the USA and other western powers, China, and various Moslem states. Kazakhstan's importance as an energy producer made her important to western oil companies, and hence enabled her to develop closer ties with major western powers, and Uzbekistan's lack of a border with Russia enabled her to assert a more independent foreign-policy line in the second half of the 1990s. Turkmenistan adopted a neutral foreign policy orientation in 1995, so distancing herself from Moscow.

This situation altered somewhat in 1999. A perception developed that there was a growing threat of Islamic extremism in Central Asia, promoted by groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and Hizb ut Tahrir, movements which undertook large-scale incursions into Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 1999 and 2000. The establishment of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1996

had concerned both Moscow and the Central Asian leaderships (with the exception of Turkmenistan), who feared the Taleban might export their revolution to Central Asia.

In May 2001 foreign minister Igor Ivanov stated that international terrorism was one of the challenges that posed a real threat to stability in the world. He noted that "one of the regions where the danger of provocations by international terrorism exists is Central Asia," and stressed that the threat to Central Asia came first of all from Afghanistan.¹ In June 2001 the Russian Security Council secretary, Vladimir Rushaylo, expressed concern over the further exacerbation of the conflict in Afghanistan and over threats coming from the Taleban and drug dealers. He said that the trans-border network of terror and drug-smuggling established on the Taleban-controlled territory of Afghanistan posed a direct threat to the security of Central Asia, India, Russia and other states. He argued that this common danger should be countered by firm collective efforts on the part of the international community to effectively neutralize the seat of instability in Afghanistan and warned:

*Serious concern also stems from enhanced threats to security and stability in the region of Russia's traditional and strategically important interests - Central Asia, from international terrorism and Islamic extremism, above all Afghanistan's Taleban.*²

Moscow's emphasis on countering Islamic terrorism from the latter half of 1999 onwards enabled her to align the Central Asian states around her on this issue. The CIS Collective Security Treaty with its anti-terrorist centre established in June 2000, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation became the organisational forms of this closer alignment. CIS rapid reaction forces were created in May 2001.

At the beginning of the Putin era therefore, Moscow had managed to develop a close orientation with the Central Asian states in the security sphere. To a certain extent this represented a clawing back of Russian geopolitical influence that had been lost in the 1990s. Even Turkmenistan, which remained aloof from most CIS organisational structures, has developed a closer relationship with Russia after Putin became president. By 2000, Uzbekistan had moved closer to Moscow, hence moving away somewhat from the more independent stance she developed in 1997.³

Reactions to the US Presence

The events of 11 September 2001 have resulted in a change in the strategic situation in Central Asia, following the launching of Operation Enduring Freedom, which resulted in the deployment of US and other NATO forces in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁴ This was a deployment for a military operation, something far beyond the Partnership for Peace (PfP) exercises in which some Central Asian states had participated with NATO forces in the past.

The development of a significant US military presence in Central Asia evoked the immediate concern of defence minister Sergey Ivanov. He said on 14 September 2001 that the territory of the countries of Central Asia should not be used for possible operations of the USA and other NATO countries against the Taleban.⁵ Putin's attitude was more relaxed. On 24 September he said that Russia's Central Asian allies are free to decide on the use of their airfields by US aircraft.⁶ Putin's statement was a reflection of reality, as Central Asian states did not require

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Russia's permission to allow NATO forces to use their bases, and he had no effective means of preventing them doing so.

Putin has raised no public objection whatsoever to a NATO military presence in Central Asia and appears to be fully supportive of the USA's war on terrorism. He has made close cooperation with the West the central feature of his foreign policy since he became president at the end of 1999. He is well aware of the dominant role currently played by the USA in the international arena, and that there is no point in trying to oppose it. He sees it as being in Russia's interest to cooperate with the USA if Russia is to have any relevance in the current unipolar world. He will therefore not oppose US military deployments in Central Asia, as to do so runs the risk of actually reducing Russian influence in Central Asia rather than enhancing it. He took a similar view of the possible deployment of US forces in Georgia in March 2002, even though his foreign minister Igor Ivanov was expressing concern over such a development.⁷

Criticism of the US presence in Central Asia has been strongest from the Duma. In January 2002 Duma chairman Gennady Seleznev visited Tajikistan. He said Russia should increase its presence in Central Asia, and criticised the US presence in the region. He later said that the USA could not set up military bases in Central Asia because it does not have a UN mandate for this.⁸ This statement appeared to be incorrect, as any decision to set up a base would be a matter for the USA and the host state, not the UN. However, it made clear Seleznev's concern over the turn of events in Central Asia.

In February 2002, the Duma committee on international affairs said it would scrutinize the agreements on providing aerodromes for US transport planes in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as part of the international antiterrorist operation. Committee chairman Dmitry Rogozin said he feared these agreements might become an "unprecedented basis for a long-term presence of US servicemen in Central Asia".⁹

The military has been at pains to emphasise that it regards the US presence in Central Asia as temporary, hence expressing its concern over the changes in the strategic position in Central Asia since September 2001. For example, in January 2002 the Director of the Russian Federal Border Guard Service, Konstantin Totskiy, said that the presence of US forces in Central Asia would become unnecessary after the counter-terrorist operation was completed in Afghanistan, and that that US forces in Central Asia should leave once the Afghan operation is completed.¹⁰ He said that no permanent bases should be set up. A similar statement was made by the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) Anatoly Kvashnin in January 2002.¹¹

On 24 January Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko said that Russia "has no grounds to mistrust repeated statements by American officials that the deployment of US military units in Central Asia will be temporary and transparent".¹² This statement was probably aimed at reassuring those in the military leadership who are concerned at the US presence. Indeed, by early February there was a slight change in tone from Totskiy, as he warned that "if the United States and other countries intend to stay here [ie in Central Asia] for good, we cannot agree to that".¹³ A certain degree of concern may also have been expressed by Security Council secretary Vladimir Rushaylo in mid-April 2002, when he said that Russia saw the presence of the American military in Central Asia only in the context of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan. "The goals, tasks

and time boundaries of the American presence in Central Asia should be clearly defined".¹⁴ On the eve of the Putin-Bush summit in May 2002, foreign minister Igor Ivanov commented that Russia "will demand transparency from the United States in the transportation and presence of a foreign military contingent in Central Asia".¹⁵

There is thus some concern about the US presence, and although defence minister Sergey Ivanov said in February that "I would not raise any unwarranted concern as yet regarding the deployment of American bases in this region ... overall we have a positive attitude towards the presence of the American military there," and First Deputy Chief of the General Staff Yury Baluyevskiy said in March that Russia fully understood the decision by Central Asian states to allow US forces to be deployed on their territory, it is likely that the military leadership is at best ambiguous about the US presence and would prefer to see it terminated as soon as possible.¹⁶ The fear expressed by Rogozin that the US presence might become long-term is probably shared by the military leadership.

In an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* in March 2002, Igor Korotchenko claimed that the anti-Putin mood in the armed forces was becoming stronger, and only about a third of the military supported Putin's pro-western foreign policy course. Korotchenko noted that CGS Anatoly Kvashnin had sharply criticised NATO's Strong Resolve 2002 exercises, and that there was strong support for Kvashnin's views in the armed forces.¹⁷

Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov, who was until July 2001 the head of the MOD's International Cooperation Department has taken an extremely critical view of Russian foreign policy since September 2001. He argued that Russia has attempted to commit geopolitical suicide since that date as a result of its pro-western foreign policy.

Russia has complicated her position not only in Central Asia, but also as a whole in the CIS. We, for 10 years, albeit not always consistently, have built a system of security along the whole perimeter of Russia's borders. And there was the hope, that in Central Asia we would succeed in forming a collective security zone. China was included in this process, and work with Iran became more active.

Of course, it's not worth talking about this from a position of being fated, if the Americans come and stay for a long time or forever. We need a sober analysis of the situation, a re-evaluation of certain values, and search for common interests with the states of the region, as our common interests are huge. These are: the orientation of the economies of these countries of the region towards Russia; questions of joint security; and commonality of cultural and historic traditions and ties. There are opportunities. The USA today will simply purchase for a defined sum or intimidate with demands for repayment the debts of some states of the region.

Knowing the Americans, their formula "Depart in order to remain," and their intention to penetrate Central Asia, I doubt that they will make a good gesture of building there bases for their forces and tomorrow suddenly pack up and leave. Hardly. They will go when they find a substitute for military force. And this substitute can be the intensification of economic and political independence of these countries on the USA, in the preparation of a reliable (from the American viewpoint) political elite in

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these countries. We see such a policy today in the Balkans and Transcaucasus, and in the Middle and Near East.

Great Britain, France and Germany display a great interest in the region. In such conditions the Americans of course could physically depart, but will undoubtedly remain politically and economically. Therefore there is a threat that in time the policy of our allies in Central Asia will become similar to the Georgian policy. It is necessary to take an example from the United States in being persistent in achieving goals, although these goals are at this time, criminal.¹⁸

Similar views were expressed by Konstantin Zatulin of the CIS Institute on Russian television in March 2002. He argued that:

What is happening at the moment is, in fact, another nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union. In actual fact, the Soviet Union didn't die in 1991 but is dying before our very eyes right now. While the newly independent states were developing and establishing new relations with Russia, there were still illusions that we would be able to preserve our previous relations albeit at the level of independent states. Now that the United States are here, political influence will follow their military presence, political influence will be followed by political concessions and preferences for their own economies and economic plans and all this will undoubtedly unfold and take effect with the Americans present. This will bury the Soviet Union once and for all.

He also argued that a western presence would undermine the development of an alliance with China:

Geopolitical interests are sometimes far more important even than such precious and necessary things as oil and gas. For example, driving a wedge into and causing the collapse of the alliance with China that is being created in the region and in Russia is a geopolitical prize worth far more than even the greatest revenue from oil and gas.¹⁹

Another view similar to Ivashov's and Zatulin's appeared in *Krasnaya Zvezda* in January.

The military presence of the US and its NATO allies in the countries of Central Asia is no coincidence. This region is quite attractive to them not only from the perspective of its hospitality, but also from the perspective of its wealth of natural resources, even more so since it is just a stone's throw from the Caspian Sea basin. Control over the hydrocarbon resources is first and foremost a most powerful financial and economic lever, by means of which Washington is given the ability to have substantial influence on the geopolitical situation not just in the region, but also throughout Asia. Now, in the very near future, this influence will be reinforced with a weighty military grouping based in the very heart of Central Asia.

It should be noted that the US and other NATO countries with increasing persistence are offering to cooperate with the countries of Central Asia in the field of trade and economic and military-technical cooperation. Against that backdrop, there are increasing declarations being made about projects for laying new pipelines through the territory of Afghanistan (here

Washington also will create long-term military bases) to circumvent Russia. It is clear that the generous financial "influence" of the US is being presented to the countries of Central Asia as rather profitable both from an economic as well as from a geopolitical perspective. Under the banner of the fight against international terrorism and extremism, the Americans have been offered a wonderful opportunity, and they are not likely to let it slip by.²⁰

The *Krasnaya Zvezda* article summed up the Russian debate over the US and NATO presence in Central Asia as follows:

One group sees this as a direct threat to Russia's security, asserting that while Moscow is acting against NATO's eastward movement, the alliance has essentially gone even further: it has ended up at our country's soft southern underbelly. In this group's opinion, by allowing the presence of US and NATO military bases on their territory, the Central Asian republics are violating the Collective Security Treaty, since they must coordinate this issue with the other partners, in particular with Russia. Therefore, Moscow must come out sharply with a demand that the military presence of the US and its NATO allies in the countries of Central Asia be cut back after the completion of the antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan.

The other group holds the opinion that the western military presence in the region has only strengthened Russia's security. As confirmation of this they cite the fact that with the help of the US and the other NATO countries, they have succeeded in eliminating the nest of international terrorism, a function served by the Taleban's Afghanistan, the drug-flow has been shut off, and illegal migration is under control.

But at the same time, this group also believes that the presence of the US and its allies in the region should be limited to the time it takes to complete the antiterrorist operation or be defined by some kind of international agreement.

It is likely that there is more support in the Russian military establishment for Ivashov's and Zatulin's views on the US presence in Central Asia than Putin's. In his comments on the NATO exercise Strong Resolve 2002, CGS Anatoly Kvashnin stated that he still considered NATO to be a bloc whose views were unchanged from the Cold War, and that saw Russia and Belarus as probable enemies. It would not therefore be surprising if these views predominate in the Russian military leadership, and the establishment of a US military presence in Central Asia is a development that would also be viewed in a negative light. Putin therefore finds himself out of step with the Russian military on this issue. It was for this reason that Yabloko leader Grigory Yavlinskiy expressed concern about the military bureaucracy's opposition to Putin's foreign policy, and warned that isolationist forces were trying to split the executive and gain political revenge. He implied that there might even be an attempt to overthrow Putin.²¹ Such a development would be unlikely, but does indicate that Putin's positive response to the changed situation in Central Asia could face considerable criticism behind the scenes.

Attitudes in Central Asia

Russia still sees the Central Asian states as key partners, with whom she desires a close political, economic and military relationship. She is the main arms supplier for these states. The Russian Federation remains the major trading partner for Central Asia. Russia is allied to the region through the CIS (in particular the CIS Collective Security Treaty), the Eurasian Economic Community and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Russia will not abandon the cooperation she has developed with these states through these various forums. The importance of Caspian energy and Russian interest in Kazakh energy resources, the continued presence of approximately 6.5 million Russians in Central Asia,²² and the fear of the spread of Islamic extremism through organisations such as IMU and Hizb ut Tahrir mean that Russia will continue to have an interest in the region. The Russian Federal Security Service's leadership of the South Anti-terror exercise in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in April 2002 is indicative of Russia's continued interest in the region. Russia and the other Central Asian states are also proceeding with the development of rapid reaction forces.

There is however a strong awareness that Central Asia has now become a new focus for US foreign policy. The statement made by US Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones to the newly created Senate Subcommittee on Central Asia and the Caucasus in December 2001 makes this undeniable:

Our country is now linked with this region in ways we could never have imagined before September 11. Our policy in Central Asia must include a commitment to deeper, more sustained, and better-coordinated engagement on the full range of issues upon which we agree and disagree. These include security cooperation, energy, and internal strengthening of these countries through political and economic reform. President Bush has invited both the presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to Washington in the coming months as the centerpiece of this intensified engagement.

We have told the leaders of these countries that America will not forget in the future those who stand by us now. After this conflict is over, we will not abandon Central Asia. We are committed to providing the resources, the high-level attention, and the multinational coordination to support reform opportunities. We want to stand by the Central Asian countries in their struggle to reform their societies in the same way they have stood by us in the war on terrorism. This is not only a new relationship, but a long-term relationship.²³

This statement led to concerns in the Russian press that Central Asia was slipping away from Russia. One commentator noted that the new level of cooperation between Russia and the USA has in an instant reduced to zero Russia's decade-long efforts to consolidate the CIS and create a CIS collective security system.²⁴ Another noted that US payments for the use of Central Asian airbases and air corridors were a significant addition to the budgets of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In addition, the USA is modernizing these bases. Russia is simply unable to compete with the USA in this arena. By way of contrast, plans to develop an air defence system for the southern part of the CIS, with its HQ based in Kazakhstan, were postponed in April 2002 because of lack of funds.²⁵ Russian press commentaries are also claiming that little progress has been made in developing a CIS collective security system since the signing of the CIS collective security treaty in May 1992, and that Central Asian military leaderships were now

looking more to the USA and Western Europe than to Moscow. The fear has been expressed that Russia is losing allies, and that she will face a renewed encirclement by the West.

Operation Enduring Freedom has thus had a significant impact on the Central Asian geopolitical landscape. It obviously makes the states of Central Asia more important to the USA and Western Europe, and thus could give these states additional levers in their relations with Moscow. The visits by US Secretary of State Colin Powell in December 2001 and US Undersecretary of State Elizabeth Jones to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in early 2002 underscored the greater importance these states now have in US foreign and security policy. The increase in US aid makes clear the increased priority Washington places on Central Asia:

US Aid to Central Asia²⁶

	FY 2001	FY 2002
Total aid (in \$ million)	244.2	408
Kazakhstan	71.5	81.6
Kyrgyzstan	40.6	49.0
Tajikistan	56.4	85.3
Turkmenistan	12.2	16.4
Uzbekistan	55.9	161.8
Regional programmes	7.6	13.9

However these states have no desire for any break with Moscow. Kazakhstan's dependence on Russian pipelines to export her oil makes it impossible for her to do so, and therefore Astana continues to lay stress on close cooperation with the Russian Federation. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev welcomes the possibility of Russia becoming a member of NATO, which would obviously make it easier for Kazakhstan to develop a closer relationship with the West, particularly the USA.²⁷

Nazarbayev's visit to the USA in December 2001 marked a significant step forward in the development of a closer US-Kazakh relationship, with the signing of an energy pact on the Caspian. It is possible that closer military ties could develop. There is Russian media concern that military assistance given by Turkey and other NATO states may pull Kazakhstan into a western geopolitical orbit.²⁸ The visit by US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in April 2002 made clear the Kazakh politico-military leadership's interest in developing closer ties with the USA. The Kazakh defence minister Mukhtar Altynbayev said that Kazakhstan was ready to make three airbases available to coalition forces. Kazakh officers will also be represented at the headquarters of the coalition forces in the USA. Altynbayev has said that Kazakhstan should cooperate with Russia, China and the USA, without giving priority to any of these states.²⁹ This is a shift away from the strong pro-Moscow orientation President Nazarbayev has emphasised since December 1991.

Altynbayev also commented that Kazakhstan was committed to cooperation with the USA in maintaining security in the Caspian region. He noted that 53 Kazakh-US joint ventures currently operate in the Kazakh section of the Caspian Sea, and said that "having made huge investments in the region's economy, the United States is also interested in maintaining security and stability here".³⁰ Altynbayev ruled out "any physical presence of US or any other forces" in Kazakhstan, but said

that Washington is expected to assist Kazakhstan in establishing the infrastructure of the country's armed forces in western Kazakhstan, including possible financial support, as well as supplies of special equipment and vessels.

Kyrgyzstan has been closely aligned with the Russian Federation since 1991. Her economic weakness left her with little choice other than to be closely tied to Moscow. Her new importance to the USA should give her greater manoeuvrability in her foreign policy orientation, although it is unlikely that Bishkek would like to drift too far from Moscow. Bishkek's current basing agreement with US and French forces is for one year. This agreement is renewable. Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev has stated that western forces will only remain for the duration of Operation Enduring Freedom. It is however clear that the Akaev leadership sees the closer relationship with the USA as a permanent feature of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy orientation. When US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Kyrgyzstan in April 2002, Akaev expressed considerable pleasure with the US modernisation of Manas airbase, and saw the airport in the long term as a means of enabling Europe to develop closer links with South East Asia. He also praised what he termed as the USA's objective of developing a "belt of security" around Afghanistan. Akaev clearly intends that Kyrgyzstan be part of this security belt.³¹

In March 2002 US-Uzbek relations took a step forward when Uzbek President Islam Karimov visited the USA, and a US-Uzbek declaration of strategic partnership was signed by Uzbek Foreign Minister Adulaziz Kamilov and US Secretary of State Colin Powell. There are claims that Karimov asked for a permanent US military presence in Uzbekistan, but the Bush Administration refused to station its forces in Uzbekistan permanently. In view of Uzbekistan's desire to distance herself from Russia in the late 1990s, then it would not be surprising if the Uzbek leadership were to see the war against terrorism as an opportunity to achieve this by developing closer ties with the USA. Islam Karimov virtually admitted as much when he stated that "the USA has done more for Uzbekistan than her CIS partners could do for her."³² The improvement in ties with the Russian leadership had largely been caused by the need for a security partner to counter the threat posed by Islamic extremism, rather than by any sincere desire to return to Moscow.

Tajikistan remains heavily dependent on Russia, and this is likely to remain the case, irrespective of Tajikistan's relationship with the USA. Again, however, the improved relationship with Washington means that Dushanbe has more leverage in its relationship than it did previously. Tajikistan joined the PFP in February 2002. The USA will also assist in improving border security on a small part of the Tajik-Afghan border. Russian press reports claim that Tajikistan has hardened her position in negotiations with Moscow over Russo-Tajik military agreements since the deployment of US and French forces in Tajikistan. A representative of the Tajik armed forces, General Aleksandr Grebenshchikov, said that the US and NATO presence in Central Asia reminded him of "the cunning crawling of a viper".³³ Such sentiments are also likely to be held by a significant proportion of the Russian military establishment.

Turkmenistan's relations with both Russia and the USA have remained largely unaffected by "9-11" and Operation Enduring Freedom. The Turkmen leadership under President Saparmurat Niyazov has held firm to its neutral foreign policy orientation. Turkmenistan has not become an active participant in the war on terrorism, and refused a request from Germany to use base facilities for German peacekeeping forces. Turkmenistan remains heavily dependent on Russian pipelines for its gas exports, and therefore needs a good relationship with Russia.

Pipeline Geopolitics

Russia has formed a gas alliance with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to coordinate gas export policies to match Europe's supply and demand more efficiently.³⁴ This allows Gazprom to play a dominating role for Central Asia's gas exports via Russia, and is thus an important factor maintaining Russian influence in Central Asia. In December 2001 the Russian company Zarubezhneft signed an agreement with Turkmenistan to exploit gas and oil resources there, and Lukoil is part of the consortium operating in the Karachaganak oil field in Kazakhstan. The dependency of the Central Asian states on Russian export routes for their gas and oil production places a significant limit on their ability to distance themselves from Moscow.

In January 1998, an agreement was signed between Pakistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan (then under Taleban rule) to arrange funding on a proposed 890-mile, \$2-billion, 1.9-billion-cubic-feet-per-day natural gas pipeline project,³⁵ which would transport natural gas from Turkmenistan's 45 trillion cubic feet Dauletabad natural gas field to Pakistan. It was most likely to run from Dauletabad south to the Afghan border and through Herat and Qandahar in Afghanistan, to Quetta in Pakistan. The line would then link with Pakistan's natural gas grid at Sui. A consortium was set up in which Unocal and Delta oil had an 85% joint stake. However in December 1998 the project was abandoned when Unocal withdrew, citing conflict in Afghanistan and the diplomatic isolation of the Taleban regime as reasons.

Besides the gas pipeline, Unocal also had considered building a 1,000-mile, 1-million barrel-per-day capacity oil pipeline that would link Chardzou, Turkmenistan to Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast via Afghanistan. Since the Chardzou refinery is already linked to Russia's Western Siberian oil fields, this line could provide a possible alternative export route for regional oil production from the Caspian Sea. The \$2.5 billion pipeline was known as the Central Asian Oil Pipeline Project.

The downfall of the Taleban regime has resulted in renewed interest in constructing a Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline. US Undersecretary of State Elizabeth Jones expressed support for the idea during talks with the Turkmen president, Saparmurat Niyazov, when she visited Turkmenistan in January 2002.

It now seems likely that the gas project will be revived. In April 2002, Turkmen president Saparmurat Niyazov said that leaders of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan would meet in Islamabad in May 2002 to sign an agreement on constructing a gas pipeline. He said a motor road and railway line and, subsequently, an oil pipeline would also be built.³⁶

Some in the Russian military-security circles must look at such a development (if it occurs) with mixed feelings. They argue that if the pipeline project goes ahead, the involvement of western (particularly American) companies in the financing of the project will give the USA a further reason for maintaining some sort of strategic presence in Central Asia. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* commentator Armen Khanbabayan assessed the geopolitical consequences for Russia as follows:

If the pipeline is built, it will permit Washington to resolve, after the economic, some primary political tasks. Having placed Afghanistan, Pakistan, and to a certain extent India on the needle of Central Asian oil

and gas, and the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia in dependence on the incomes from the export and the transit of energy carriers, America, as the basic guarantor of the functioning of this route, will significantly strengthen her position in the whole wide region from the Caspian to the southern shores of the Arabian Sea. At the same time serious competition for OPEC and Russia will be created. It is also of great importance for American diplomacy that in such a configuration, the attractiveness of Iran as a transit route will diminish, and this could lead to the countries of the region distancing themselves from Tehran.

The West's "pipeline" plans, if realised, could cardinaly change the whole geopolitical configuration along Russia's southern borders. In particular, the so-called near abroad could become the far abroad a little earlier than it is acceptable to consider in Moscow, where all proceeds in accordance with the splendid opinion that "they have nowhere to go apart from us". Besides, if Russia does nothing to oppose in the economic and political plane the new tendencies in the post-Soviet space, then all that will remain, so it seems, will be consoling oneself with the naïve myths of imperial origins.³⁷

However these arguments may be unduly pessimistic. Kazakhstan is unenthusiastic about the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, and prefers to export her oil along the pipeline of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. The proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline is only likely to be a very long-term challenge to Russian interests, as there are serious doubts as to the commercial viability of the project, and if energy companies are not interested, then the project will probably not be realised. If on other hand, there is commercial interest, and the project does proceed, then it is not impossible that Russian energy companies may form part of a consortium, which would also undermine the arguments of the Russian pessimists.

Conclusions

In February 2002, Elizabeth Jones sought to give the following assurances about US policy in Central Asia:

We are not looking for, we don't want, US bases in Central Asia. We don't want a US base anywhere ... our goal with the Russians is to make sure they understand that we are not trying to compete with them in Central Asia, we're not trying to take over Central Asia from them, but we have common interests - international common interests - that we will be transparent about as they play out in Central Asia.³⁸

She said that the United States and Russia have been in "complete agreement on what are our goals vis-à-vis Afghanistan, the importance of assuring that the threats coming out of Afghanistan don't threaten Russia". She also commented that the Russians "are right with us on working to ensure that border guard programs are beefed up, that counter-narcotics work is beefed up, and all that kind of thing to prevent the threat traffic".³⁹

Whatever the final outcome in Afghanistan, it is likely that the states of Central Asia will be of increased importance to the West, and particularly the USA, as security partners. To cite Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, the USA is creating a

“security belt” around Afghanistan that consists of the Central Asian states.⁴⁰ Although it is not intended that US forces be permanently deployed in the region as part of this security belt, the creation of the belt does require a considerable intensification of the political and military relationship between the USA and Central Asia. In due course, this may also include an intensified economic relationship. If peace is brought to the region, then to a significant extent it may be a Pax Americana, and this could increase the interest of US and western companies in the region, particularly oil and gas companies in Kazakhstan. If peace does not come, but the current level of instability remains or increases, then Operation Enduring Freedom will continue, which means a continued US (and other western) military presence.

Hence, whatever the final outcome in Central Asia, the region is unlikely to be as closely oriented towards Moscow as she was previously, and to a certain extent Operation Enduring Freedom may have undermined the success of the Putin leadership since December 1999 in tying the Central Asian states closer to Moscow. Russia successfully lined up the Central Asian states behind it on the need to counter terrorism. Ironically, the USA has since proved itself to be a more successful partner in this field, and may well have created a sphere of influence in Central Asia. Certainly the more ambitious states in the region, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, welcome the development of strategic partnerships with the USA as a means of balancing Russian influence. Russia’s failure to develop an effective CIS collective security system certainly weakens Moscow’s attraction as a security partner compared to the USA.

Russia’s attitude to the changed geopolitical situation in Central Asia is probably one of mixed feelings. The destruction of the Taleban regime in Afghanistan is welcome, and Russia now has an opportunity to regain some influence in Afghanistan. Putin appears unconcerned by the US presence in Central Asia. He has based his foreign policy on the need for close cooperation with the western world, and particularly with its leader, the USA, if Russia is to rebuild and have any relevance in the international system. There is therefore little point in Moscow opposing the USA, especially as Washington is powerful enough to take action irrespective of Moscow’s views. Better to be junior partner than to be completely ignored, which would probably result in Russia losing even more influence in Central Asia. Russia’s lack of power leaves her with few options. Close cooperation with the USA and EU gives Russia the best long-term option for emerging from her current impotent state, and it is therefore logical for Russia not to obstruct the sole remaining superpower. Two possible benefits may be a transformed NATO with a reduced US commitment to European security, which has been a long-standing Russian goal, and the enhancement of the Russia-EU partnership. The USA may also be more willing to consider Russia as a useful security partner in other regional trouble spots such as the Middle East.

This is a long-term view, and it is probably not widely shared in the security community in Moscow. The military leadership is still accustomed to thinking in Cold War terms and probably views the US and western presence in Central Asia in terms of a zero sum game. This view is probably more widespread, but if persistently declared would be an open challenge to Putin, and thus unlikely to prevail. Just as the former Warsaw Pact states, the Baltic states and the GUUAM states have drifted away from Moscow towards the West, the Russian military-security lobby is now seeing a similar process taking place in Central Asia and fears that even if no permanent US or other NATO bases are established, there will be a substantial geopolitical re-orientation of the region away from Moscow towards the

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West, particularly Washington. In the eyes of the Russian security lobby, the new US relationship with Central Asia carries the risk of Russia being encircled and thereby becoming even more geopolitically irrelevant.

However, the views of the military-security lobby may well be excessively pessimistic. The rapid victory in Afghanistan makes it unlikely that there will be a major long-term US military presence in Central Asia, and the USA has been anxious to assure Moscow that is not directed against Russia. The USA sees Russia as a vital partner in the anti-terrorist struggle, and is therefore unlikely to allow Central Asian states to undermine her new relationship with Moscow. The Russian Federation was consulted over Tajikistan's entrance into the PFP. The USA is not going to replace Russia as the main arms supplier and security partner to the states of Central Asia, and Central Asia's main trade partners will continue to be other CIS states. The state that would most like to use the war on terrorism to loosen ties with Moscow is Uzbekistan, and Tashkent's reluctance to open the Friendship Bridge with Afghanistan to allow the inflow of humanitarian aid only served to irritate rather than impress her western partners. Tajikistan still remains a de facto Russian protectorate, and no western power is willing to replace Russia as Dushanbe's protector. Kyrgyzstan still has no choice other than to look to Moscow as her main partner. The gas alliance formed between Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan gives Russia a powerful lever of influence in the region.

Russia intends to continue to play a key role in Central Asia, despite the limited progress in developing a CIS collective security system and problems in developing an air defence system. It has been decided to develop a charter for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, so indicating the desire of Russia and the other members to develop this organisation.⁴¹ There have been no major statements on policy towards Central Asia by Moscow since September 2001, and her policy towards the region appears to be a continuation of the pre-September 2001 policy line. Her economic weaknesses mean that she has nothing new to offer Central Asian states. However, this should not be seen as a setback for Moscow, as the Central Asian states still need a close, cooperative relationship with the Russian Federation, and in many respects Moscow remains their only choice.

US influence in Central Asia is higher than it was before 11 September 2001, and will remain so, and this does give the states of Central Asia a greater degree of manoeuvrability in their foreign policies than hitherto, and Moscow has no choice other than to live with that. However the Central Asian states will still be unable to reduce substantially Moscow's presence in Central Asia. Russia is unlikely to suffer the loss of influence that she has in other regions of the former USSR since 1991. By not opposing the USA's new role in Central Asia, Putin has probably done the best thing he could both to preserve Russia's influence in Central Asia and with the USA. Indeed, the development of a new strategic partnership with Washington may be the best means of maintaining and possibly even enhancing Russian influence in Central Asia. This does not mean, however, that the military-security lobby will accept this argument.

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) SU/4160, 21 May 2001.
 - ² SWB SU/4177, 7 June 2001.

³ For a brief overview of the Russo-Uzbek relationship, see Martin C Spechler, 'Free at last? Uzbekistan and Russia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol 49, No 1, January-February 2002, pp63-67.

⁴ Western forces are using the following bases: Khanabad and Kokaydy (Uzbekistan); Dushanbe and Kulyab (Tajikistan); Manas (Kyrgyzstan). See Mikhail Khodarenok, 'The "senior brother" is given up for a billion dollars', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 30 January 2002.

⁵ SWB SU/4277, 15 September 2001.

⁶ SWB SU/4288, 26 September 2001.

⁷ SWB SU/4448, 5 March 2002.

⁸ SWB SU/4396, 12 January 2002.

⁹ SWB SU/4421, 6 February 2002.

¹⁰ SWB SU/4407, 23 January 2002.

¹¹ SWB SU/4404, 20 January 2002.

¹² SWB SU/4409, 25 January 2002.

¹³ SWB SU/4422, 7 February 2002.

¹⁴ SWB SU/4487, 12 April 2002.

¹⁵ RFE/RL Newline 21 May 2002

<http://www.rferl.org/newline/2002/05/210502.asp>

¹⁶ Sergey Ivanov, SWB/4428, 13 February 2002, Yury Baluyevskiy, SWB SU/4456, 13 March 2002.

¹⁷ Igor Korotchenko, 'Army double power', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 6 March 2002.

¹⁸ See the interview with Leonid Ivashov in 'Russia, lurching from side to side', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 March 2002, p10.

¹⁹ Russian NTV Mir, 14 March 2002, cited on BBC Monitoring website

<http://news.monitor.bbc.co.uk>

²⁰ R Streshnev, 'Allies are preparing to be "guests" for a long time', *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 24 January 2002.

²¹ SWB SU/4499, 25 April 2002.

²² Numbers of Russian living in Central Asia ('000s).

Country	January 1989	January 1999
Kazakhstan	6,062.0	4,479.6
Kirgiziya	916.6	603.2
Tajikistan	388.5	80
Turkmenistan	333.9	240
Uzbekistan	1,653.5	1,150

Mikhail Tul'skiy, 'True face of the demographic catastrophe', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 July 2001.

²³ www.usembassy.org.uk/forpo470.html

²⁴ Natal'ya Ayrapetova, 'How Russia "left" the CIS', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 26 December 2001.

²⁵ SWB SU/4478, 4 April 2002.

²⁶ <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2002/7951.htm>

²⁷ Nazarbayev made this comment when US Secretary of State Colin Powell visited Kazakhstan in December 2001. See Sergey Kozlov, 'The entering of Russia into NATO will calm all', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14 December 2001.

²⁸ Armen Khanbalyan, Mikhail Khodarenok, 'American marines on the steppes of Kazakhstan', *Nezavismaya Gazeta*, 29 March 2002.

²⁹ SWB SU/4497, 23 April 2002, SWB SU/4503, 29 April 2002.

³⁰ SWB SU/4504, 30 April 2002.

³¹ SWB SU/4502, 28 April 2002.

³² Viktoriya Panfilova, Armen Khanbalyan, 'Patrushev, Tot'skiy and Rumsfeld complete a pilgrimage', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 25 April 2002.

³³ Viktoriya Panfilova, 'To the west following behind Moscow', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 4 March 2002.

³⁴ Economist Intelligence Unit Turkmenistan Country Report, March 2002, p14.

³⁵ See US Energy Department website Country Analytical Briefs Afghanistan. The following paragraphs are based on information from this website.

³⁶ Turkmenistan.RU Internet newspaper website, 23 April 2002, from BBC Monitoring website <http://news.monitor.bbc.co.uk>

³⁷ Armen Khanbabayan "Farewell Slavyanka" as the cry of political fashion', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2 February 2002.

³⁸ www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2002/7946.htm

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ SWB SU/4502, 28 April 2002.

⁴¹ See Igor Ivanov's call on 21 May 2002 for enhancing the role of the CIS Collective Security Treaty and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in building security in Central Asia. See RFE/RL Newsline 21 May 2002, cited in footnote 15.

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