

**Michael Mayer**

# US grand strategy and Central Asia

Merging geopolitics and ideology



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Cover photo: Manas air base, Kyrgyz Republic: Airmen step off of a C-17 as they arrive here from Afghanistan, 2 Sep 2008. (Air Force photo/Ruth Holcomb.)

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### abstract

After the demise of the Cold War, US strategic planning gradually adjusted to the new security environment, aiming to maintain its dominant global position while increasingly emphasizing regional security, governance issues and threats from non-state actors. The George W. Bush administration greatly accelerated these trends. US grand strategy today is one of global primacy, characterized by a dual focus on preventing the rise of any regional hegemonic powers while addressing regional security issues stemming from transnational and non-state threats.

Current US grand strategy exhibits, as it has for decades, two fundamental components: geopolitical reasoning and ideological interests. The geographical focus of US strategy has gradually shifted to a broad arc stretching from Western Africa to Southeast Asia, an area rich in vital strategic resources and widespread political and social instability.

Located at the center of this unstable arc, Central Asia contains many of the global challenges facing the US: regional powers, unstable and authoritarian states, energy resources, terrorism, proliferation threats and international criminal networks. With its regional strategy, the US seeks to shift the political center of gravity away from Russia and China by encouraging economic and political linkages between Central Asia and the region's southerly neighbors. This study reveals that the geopolitical and ideological elements in US strategy create both surprising synergies as well as classic conflicts of interest for policymakers. The challenges facing the US in Central Asia offer lessons for US strategy in other regions around the globe.

**KEYWORDS:** US grand strategy, Central Asia, geopolitics



# Introduction

The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power. In this world it is impossible to draw neat, clear lines between our security interests, our development efforts and our democratic ideals.

*Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, January 2006*

In his classic 1997 treatise *The Grand Chessboard*, Zbigniew Brzezinski proffered a sweeping strategic analysis grounded in classic geopolitical reasoning.<sup>1</sup> The historical key to extending America's unipolar moment in the post-Cold War world was to prevent the rise of a peer competitor on the Eurasian continent. By far the largest, most populous and most economically productive continent on earth, Eurasia contained the necessary ingredients for generating global power, according to Brzezinski. A particularly vital region stretched from the Caucasus to the easternmost fringes of Central Asia, an area Brzezinski termed the Eurasian Balkans. With Russian, Chinese, Iranian and Turkish interests in the region, Brzezinski argued that "America's primary interest is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it."<sup>2</sup>

Brzezinski claimed that traditional geopolitical thinking focused on controlling sections of the Eurasian continent, but that in these modern times of global geopolitics, "preponderance over the entire

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1 The author would like to thank Olof Kronvall for his thoughtful and extremely valuable comments on an earlier draft. A note of thanks also to Svein Melby and Ingerid Opdahl. As always, all errors and omissions in this paper are my own.

2 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 148.

Eurasian continent” was essential for global primacy, but that Central Asia was a crucial piece of the puzzle.<sup>3</sup> A decade later, Stephen Blank summarized US interests in Central Asia in a similar fashion, stating that “America’s policy of defending the independence, integrity, and security of these states serves to extend the vital geostrategic interests of the United States in forestalling the possible rise of a Eurasian empire on either continent.”<sup>4</sup> According to Blank, the commonly held view that US interests in Central Asia are based on access to resources and promoting democracy is “utterly misplaced.”<sup>5</sup>

Control over the Eurasian continent – and Central Asia in particular – as the vital geopolitical prize for those states concerned with global power is an idea rooted in early twentieth-century strategic thinking, most notably associated with Sir Halford Mackinder. Over a century later, does this strategic mindset continue to have relevance? How might we consider the “geopolitical” importance of Central Asia, given America’s wide-ranging and evolving interests in an increasingly globalized world? These questions are best approached by placing the region within a broader context. What are, in fact, the overarching strategic interests and plans of the United States, how do its region-specific policies in Central Asia mesh with these global plans, and what conclusions might be drawn from Washington’s regional strategy that have relevance for its global one ?

The answer, which this study will demonstrate, is that Central Asia indeed remains an important region for the United States. The reasoning behind this, however, has shifted in some fundamental ways. The United States today pursues a strategy of global primacy, whereby it actively strives to maintain its global power position by conducting a twofold strategy: hinder the rise of any regional powers that may challenge it, and confront a host of transnational and non-state threats to its security. The US seeks to accomplish both of these overarching tasks by maintaining a preponderance of military force throughout the world, securing strategic access to vital regions, using political and diplomatic efforts to ensure its ability to act independently and unimpeded when its vital interests are threatened, and increasingly adopting measures that focus on preventing the development of threats within other states. Finally, US grand strategy during the Bush ad-

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3 Ibid, p. 39.

4 Stephen Blank, “The Strategic Importance of Central Asia: An American View,” *Parameters* (spring 2008) (US Army War College [online 13 Nov 08]): 77–87.

5 Ibid.



ministration has emphasized ideology to such a degree that it has become a strategic interest in itself, whereby the promotion of liberal values such as democracy and individual freedom are building blocks in US efforts to counteract terrorism and regional instability.

The combination of interests, threats, geographic focus, ideology and evolving strategic thinking since the Cold War has resulted in the continued relevance of Central Asia, but from an altered geopolitical perspective. While Eurasia remains a geopolitically important region, it no longer constitutes the sole focus of US grand strategy, which now includes a broad geographic arc of unstable and authoritarian states. This “new” geopolitical reality in Central Asia – and the US responses to it – has implications for Washington’s global strategic planning and its implementation. Central Asia may be an early indication of how an eventual multi-polar system might look. The US competes for political and economic influence with actors such as Russia and China in the region, while at the same time attempting to address structural security interests and promote its ideological agenda of freedom and democratic ideals. In Central Asia, the two main elements of US grand strategy (hindering regional hegemonic powers and countering the threat posed by non-state actors) are in direct geographic proximity: Russia to the north, China to the east, Afghanistan to the south. The two strategic elements therefore interact in both complementary and conflicting ways in the region. *In short, the new geopolitics of Central Asia reflects a far greater complexity than traditional great power politics alone, and integrating both strategic elements presents serious challenges to policymakers.*

## Grand strategy and competing interests

Colin Dueck defines grand strategy as the “self-conscious identification and prioritization of foreign policy goals; an identification of existing and potential resources; and a selection of a plan which uses those resources to meet those goals.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Colin Gray writes that “the crux of grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity of the nation’s leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and nonmilitary, for the preservation and enhancement of the nation’s long-term (that is, in wartime *and* peacetime) best interests.”<sup>7</sup> Policymakers develop grand strategy, according to Christopher Layne,

6 Colin Dueck, “Ideas and alternatives in American grand strategy, 2000–2004,” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 30 (2004): 512.

through a three-step process of “determining a state’s vital security interests; identifying the threats to those interests; and deciding how best to employ the state’s political, military, and economic resources to protect those interests.”<sup>8</sup>

All of these conceptualizations of grand strategy describe a comprehensive and broad-reaching plan that involves all aspects of foreign policy in an organized pursuit of the country’s “vital” or “best” interests. Defining these interests for the United States, however, has led to a well-known and fundamental conflict between realism and idealism. Policy formation has long entailed a struggle to reconcile the normative goals upon which the United States was founded, and the demands of political pragmatism upon which a state with global interests depends.<sup>9</sup> Two recent attempts to weave together these two enduring strands in foreign policy are particularly noteworthy. In July 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice presented a realism-idealism amalgamation as the core of what she called “American Realism.” According to Rice, America’s moral ideas and principles should dictate the nation’s foreign policy as much as material interests: “American Realism deals with the world as it is, but strives to make the world better than it is. More free. More just. More peaceful. More prosperous. And ultimately safer. Not perfect. Just better.”<sup>10</sup> Her colleague at the Department of Defense, Robert Gates, had a similar message later that year, stating that “the spread of liberty both manifests our ideals and protects our interests – in making the world ‘safe for democracy,’ we are also the ‘champion and vindicator’ of our own. In reality, Wilson and Adams must coexist.”<sup>11</sup>

In his analysis of US grand strategy, Colin Dueck sees the primary theoretical lens used by American policymakers as a realist one, with an emphasis on core assumptions of that perspective: the importance of power, material wealth, the explanatory power of international structures, and the state as the primary actor in the system. On top of

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7 Colin Gray, “Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition” in *Grand Strategies in War and Peace*, ed. Colin Gray (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 5 [original emphasis].

8 Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing” in *America’s Strategic Choices*, eds. Michael E. Brown, Owen R. Coté Jr., Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), p. 246.

9 One of many classic works on this is Robert E. Osgood’s *Ideals and Self-interest in America’s Foreign Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

10 Condoleezza Rice, “The Power and Promise of American Realism,” remarks to the Economic Club of New York, *Real Clear Politics*, 7 June 2007 [online 17 Nov 2008].

11 Robert Gates, speech at the World Forum on the future of Democracy, Williamsburg, VA, 17 September 2007 (U.S. Department of Defense [17 Nov 2008]).

this, he adds a cultural lens that takes into account domestic factors that precipitate adjustments to the “default” realist analysis.<sup>12</sup> But for Dueck this cultural lens is not only important for understanding Washington’s liberal rhetoric. Ideology plays more than an instrumental role in US foreign policy. He argues that the rhetoric of democracy, human rights and open markets concretely influences US policy. Inclusion of liberal ideas in US foreign policy forces policymakers to tailor their policies to match their rhetoric to some extent, in order to maintain public support. Leaders can find themselves constrained by their own rhetoric simply to maintain their credibility. Further, in many cases US officials come to believe in the liberal rhetoric used initially to justify a policy action. As Robert Jervis also observes, “there is a tendency for people to act in accord with the explanations they have given for their own behavior, which means that the [Bush] doctrine could guide behavior even if it were originally a rationalization.”<sup>13</sup>

The discussion and debate over elements of realism and idealism in US foreign policy has long historical roots. The analytical usefulness of these terms, however, is questionable. Realism might easily be substituted with pragmatism, thereby emphasizing expedient policies that exclusively serve the national interest. Such actions may not always be in alignment with a foreign policy based on the International Relations theory of Realism, which prioritizes balancing and the accumulation of national power. Analytical confusion may arise when observing ostensibly idealistically inspired actions carried out in a pragmatic nature, such as the Iraq war. Therefore, this study argues that the implementation of a “realist” grand strategy will involve first and foremost a strategy guided by geopolitical reasoning, combining the “where” (the location of strategic interest) with the “why” (the motivations behind it). It will be demonstrated that geopolitically inspired policies may generally be thought of as the real-world application of realist theory.

Similarly, the term idealism, while commonly used, also becomes analytically clumsy upon closer inspection. According to the Webster’s dictionary entry, idealists are guided by specific standards or goals of perfection, often without regard to practical considerations.

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12 Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 18–20.

13 Robert Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 118, no. 3 (2003): 365.

Idealism also carries an altruistic connotation of pursuing noble aims. While many policies termed “idealistic” may fall under such a definition, the motives behind US policy are much more complex. Idealistically inspired policies have often had instrumental and practical aspects as well. This study will utilize the term “ideology” as a more neutral term for US historical and philosophical interests in democracy promotion and human rights. Together, geopolitics and ideology represent two major and reoccurring themes in post World War II US grand strategy, and are two themes that have shaped the strategic thinking of US policymakers in the twenty-first century.

## Method: finding a grand strategy

The study of grand strategy, especially in the later part of the Bush administration, has included offerings from many renowned scholars. Some have based their analyses of US grand strategy on theoretical assumptions garnered from a particular International Relations perspective. In this way, US interests, threats, and strategic goals can be extrapolated from a set of “givens.” This approach solves some methodological issues, such as evaluating rhetoric and strategic documents to separate instrumental speech from accurate statements of strategic direction. In the end, however, an analysis of US strategy based exclusively on theoretical assumptions relies more on the theory’s compatibility with US policy than its accuracy in identifying US goals and the logic employed in creating a strategic framework to achieve them.

In addition, many of the works dealing with American grand strategy are less a thorough analysis of existing strategic policy than an argument for a particular strategic course advocated by the author.<sup>14</sup> While such books are extremely valuable and impressive in their depth, detail and argumentation, an analysis and comparison of administration statements and implemented policies might lead to nuances not seen in such sweeping works.<sup>15</sup> This study seeks to explore

14 Recent works include Christopher Layne, *The Peace of Illusions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2005); Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003); Robert Art, *A Grand Strategy for America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002): 20–33.

15 Studies of implemented strategy include Stephen Biddle, *American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2005) and Nathan Freier, “Primacy without a Plan,” *Parameters* (autumn 2006) (US Army War College [online 17 Nov 2008]): 5–21.

US grand strategy objectively in order to highlight its internal strategic logic rather than pass judgment upon it. Some elements of US strategy have been analyzed in this way, but few studies attempt to connect the dots, as it were, to sketch the broad lines of US strategic planning and implementation.<sup>16</sup> This study seeks to fill that void.

One legitimate criticism of analyzing any overarching grand strategy is the real possibility that such a broad plan simply does not exist – that the cumulative sum of US military, economic, and political policies overseas are not planned in an orderly and conscious manner. Rather, it may be argued that these policies evolve in a haphazard and somewhat random fashion, dictated by short-term objectives, bureaucratic maneuvering, and the accumulation of reactive policies to unfolding events on the ground. Several distinguished scholars and strategists have argued that US strategy exhibits such incoherence and disorganization as to suggest the absence of a grand strategy.<sup>17</sup> Some strategists also point to tenets of chaos theory to illustrate how world events do not necessarily follow a linear progression, but can be affected by spontaneous and unpredictable random elements. Strategic planners must not assume that policies enacted today will produce the exact future results desired.<sup>18</sup> Dueck responds that

whether or not a strategic plan literally exists, nations must make difficult choices on matters of defense spending, alliance diplomacy, and military intervention. Decisions regarding trade-offs between ends and means are inevitable, even if they are neither coherent nor coordinated.”<sup>19</sup>

It therefore becomes necessary to differentiate between a formalized grand strategic plan such as a national security strategy, and the grand strategy as implemented – the actual distribution of a nation’s resources. While nations are usually reluctant to reveal the totality of their strategic plans, the strategy’s implementation is more difficult to con-

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16 Works that analyse strategic statements and their internal logic include for example: John Lewis Gaddis, *Surprise, Security and the American Experience* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2004); John Lewis Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation,” *Foreign Policy* (1 December 2002) [online 20 Nov 2008]; and to some extent: Andrew Bacevich, *American Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

17 See Freier, “Primacy without a Plan” or Biddle, *American Grand Strategy after 9/11*.

18 For more on this point, see Harry R. Yarger, *Strategic Theory for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Little Book on Big Strategy* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2006), especially chapter 3.

19 Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 11.

ceal and therefore easier to observe. The grand strategy “as implemented,” the most relevant for analyses of “real world” policies, provides a means of corroborating the strategic thinking presented in defense documents.

This study therefore intends to utilize a two-pronged approach for identifying US grand strategy by first observing stated US policy and then supplementing it with observations of US policy as implemented. The first set of observations will make use of key national security documents (National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, Quadrennial Defense Review, etc), congressional testimony by State and Defense Department officials, and speeches by administration officials regarding the broad lines of US strategy. The other set of observations are those that show the implementation of strategy and will include two levels of governmental action. One source will be mid-level policy planning documents and initiatives crafted to carry out the administration’s strategy, such as the National Military Strategy and the State Department’s Transformational Diplomacy initiative. In addition, concrete policy actions taken by the United States will be taken into account, such as budgetary decisions and funding levels, military to military cooperation, congressional legislation, and diplomatic efforts on various levels.

Sweeping policy objectives and declarations of US intentions often included in strategy documents and foreign policy speeches are in many respects detached from the daily compromises that define US foreign relations. While these examples may simply represent necessary exceptions to an overall strategy that cannot possibly be rigidly adhered to in every instance, they do symbolize the importance of integrating statements of strategic intent with actual policy positions and concrete actions such as defense spending. As grand strategy refers to the allocation, distribution, or prioritization of a nation’s resources, it may be most accurately observed through a synthesis of stated US interests, strategies and policies: seeing strategy as a sum of its many parts.

This approach hopes to provide as complete an overview of US grand strategy as possible from unclassified sources. The unwieldy nature of American bureaucracy and the lack of coordination between its many parts prohibit the perfect execution of a single strategic plan. However, US military, economic and political resources must be allocated in some fashion or another, forcing some type of strategic decision-making to occur. The prioritization shown in the distribution of

limited resources in those three areas, combined with declared strategic interests and goals, should provide a picture of US grand strategy, insofar as one can be seen.

While the combination of strategic planning and practical implementation creates a much more accurate picture of US grand strategy, a better understanding of the operational aspects and consequences of strategic decision-making can be gained through an examination of a particular region. US grand strategy assumes a global focus that necessarily must be carried out on a regional basis, and few regions encapsulate the entirety of US strategy better than Central Asia. Exploring the relationship between Washington's global strategy and its regional strategy in Central Asia offers an opportunity to substantiate the relevance and accuracy of the strategy extrapolated by this study, as well as the chance to observe deviations from, and challenges to, such a strategy.

## Structure

This study is divided into two main sections, one dealing with US grand strategy and the second with US policy in Central Asia. In section one, the concept of geopolitics will be examined and a typology of the term offered. A brief historical overview of US grand strategy will then show the particular relevance of geopolitical thinking for US Cold War containment strategy, as well as the consistent inclusion of ideological elements in US strategic thinking. Next, a thorough analysis of current US grand strategy will show that while the US has made substantial adjustments since the end of the Cold War, geopolitical reasoning and ideological elements remain common threads. Further, current grand strategy contains a geopolitical focus that has shifted from the traditional emphasis on Eurasia, a shift that gives rise to a new geopolitics in Central Asia while retaining its relevance to US strategic thinking. An analysis of US strategic policy *as implemented* provides converging evidence of this new focus, the emerging threats, and the new capabilities currently being developed to address them.

In section two, background on Central Asian politics provides some context for the presentation of US strategy for that region. This background material is crucial for understanding not only US motivations and hindrances in the region, but also the interests of other actors. The next chapter presents the regional strategy pursued by the

US, divided by policymakers into categories corresponding to those of grand strategy: military, political and economic. Its implementation reveals the challenges faced by the US in furthering its interests in such regions. Central Asia contains many of the elements – and the conflicts – of the global strategy, themes which will then be expanded upon in the concluding chapter.



# Geopolitics and ideology in US grand strategy

## Conceptualizing geopolitics

“Few modern ideologies are as whimsically all-encompassing, as romantically obscure, as intellectually sloppy, and as likely to start a third world war as the theory of ‘geopolitics,’” complained Charles Clover in a 1999 *Foreign Affairs* article.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the century-long history of the term, geopolitics has been used and misused to the point where its utility as a meaningful concept has been significantly reduced. The original conceptualization of geopolitics, developed by Rudolf Kjellman and later adapted by Nazi Germany’s Karl Haushofer, saw the state in Darwinian terms as a biological organism. Superior organisms (states) would naturally expand and absorb weaker ones as part of the natural evolutionary process.<sup>21</sup> Geopolitics has generally not been used or understood in this manner since that time, though some still associate the term with its historical lineage. Purveyors and practitioners of geopolitics in recent years also have in many instances failed to specify what exactly is meant when using some variation of the word. For the concept of geopolitics to have any analytical value, its meaning must first be clarified and more narrowly defined. A typology of geopolitics may be said to encompass three aspects.

First, geopolitics contains a descriptive component explaining the realities of the geographical landscape as it relates to international political and strategic matters. International borders are but one example in which geography plays a crucial role in political matters, from the

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20 Charles Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2 (1999): 9.

21 G. R. Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy 1890–1987* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1988), p. 6.

discussions among states over their demarcation, the rivers that transect them, the mountain ranges that hinder the movement of both merchants and armies across them, and the minerals and energy resources found within or even straddling them. Another might be maritime choke points such as the Malacca Straits, the Suez Canal, and the Straits of Hormuz. Describing the political and strategic realities of international relations in objective terms cannot be accomplished without acknowledging the physical realities of geographical position. Colin S. Gray argues that “all politics is geopolitics” due to the fact that “all political matters occur within a particular geographical context.”<sup>22</sup>

A second use of the term geopolitics is the prescriptive element that entails a global strategy to secure a nation’s interests and offers policymakers a plan of action given the realities of the descriptive component. Geopolitical reasoning here implies a process by which policymakers view and divide the world according to preconceptions based on theoretical assumptions, political realities, and ideological convictions. Gearóid Ó Tuathail, taking a more critical look at geopolitics, views it as:

a problem-solving theory for the conceptualization and practice of statecraft. A convenient label for a variety of traditions and cultures of theory and practice, geopolitics sees itself as an instrumental form of knowledge and rationality. It takes the existing power structures for granted and works within these to provide conceptualization and advice to foreign policy decision-makers. Its dominant modes are declarative (“This is how the world is”) and then imperative (“this is what we must do.”)<sup>23</sup>

This prescriptive element might also be termed *geostrategy*, defined by Brzezinski as the “strategic management of geopolitical interests.”<sup>24</sup> Colin Gray makes the more general argument that “all strategy is geostrategy” because “strategy is always ‘done’ tactically by what Carl von Clausewitz called war’s ‘grammar,’ in specific geographical contexts.”<sup>25</sup> Ó Tuathail argues that geostrategy is “a form of geopolitical

22 Colin S. Gray, “Inescapable Geopolitics” in *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 164 [original emphasis].

23 Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society,” in *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 109.

24 Brzezinski, *Grand Chessboard*, p. 31.

discourse that makes explicit strategic claims about the material national security interests of the state across a world map characterized by state competition, threats and dangers.<sup>26</sup> In *The White House Years*, Henry Kissinger frequently refers to “geopolitics” and the “geopolitical” aspects of particular issues, which he defined as “an approach that pays attention to the requirements of equilibrium<sup>27</sup>.” These statements highlight the close relationship between prescriptive geopolitics and the International Relations theory of Realism, where power, state survival, and an anarchical international system are fundamental assumptions. The overriding aim of a realist-based foreign policy is the pursuit of materialistic military and economic capabilities (the means of wielding power in the international system according to realists) as well as balancing against the capabilities of those states that threaten the interests, and therefore the survival, of the state. Geopolitical reasoning embraces many of these same assumptions.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, the third way in which geopolitics is used refers to a specific theoretical perspective entailing a global strategy based on an almost unavoidable confrontation between maritime- and continental-based powers vying for global dominance. Reflected in the writings of theoreticians such as Sir Halford MacKinder and Nicholas Spykman, the prescriptive theory of geopolitics asserts that control over the Eurasian continent in some manner (either by controlling its heart or its boundaries) is the key to global power, a theory to which the aforementioned Brzezinski subscribes. The similarities between this view and the US Cold War strategy of containment will be expanded upon in the following section, while Russian strategists supporting this theory are represented in a school of thought known as Eurasianism.<sup>29</sup>

US foreign policy has consistently been interlaced at various times with all three types of geopolitical thinking. The Monroe Doctrine in 1823 set out to establish the Western Hemisphere as solely within the

25 Gray, “Inescapable Geopolitics”, p. 164.

26 Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “Geopolitical Structures and Cultures: Toward Conceptual Clarity in the Critical Study of Geopolitics,” in *Geopolitics: Global Problems and Regional Concerns*, Bison Paper, no. 4 (Winnipeg: Centre for Defence and Security Studies, 2002), pp. 75–99.

27 Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nickelsen, 1979), p. 914.

28 Adherents of critical geopolitics find it troubling that this linkage is simply accepted without reflection. Their view is that geopolitical theory, argumentation, and the very use of the word presuppose a set of underlying assumptions biased toward Great Powers and Great Power politics. Geopolitics therefore cannot hope to be an objective portrayal of political factors that are geographically based. See Ó Tuathail, “Understanding Critical Geopolitics.”

29 Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland.”

US sphere of influence. In the mid-1800s, the concept of Manifest Destiny reflected a belief held by American leaders that it was their country's fate to expand its borders to the Pacific Ocean. President Theodore Roosevelt strengthened the Monroe Doctrine in 1904 by proclaiming American willingness to employ military might to enforce the spirit of European non-intervention in the hemisphere. These actions reflect geopolitical thinking that couples geographical realities together with political interests in order to form strategy and policy. Three prominent geopolitical thinkers have influenced US strategic thinking on a global scale over the past century: Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sir Halford MacKinder and Nicholas Spykman.

### **Alfred Thayer Mahan**

One of the more prominent geopolitical theorists, writing just before the term "geopolitics" was actually coined, was the American naval strategist Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan. His seminal work, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, published in 1890, became an instant global success and made a lasting impact in the field of geopolitics. At the end of the nineteenth century, railroads and steam engines were revolutionizing the transport sector. Mahan argued that while rail stood for the majority of a country's internal trade, the bulk of international trade relied (and would continue to rely) on shipping, as waterborne transport remained easier and cheaper than land transport.<sup>30</sup> The wealthiest countries, active in maritime economic activities such as production, shipping, and colonial endeavors, required substantial naval capabilities to protect these interests.<sup>31</sup> Mahan's argument for the importance of naval supremacy was grounded in the belief that sea power was crucial to the economic and security interests of the state. Scholar John Gooch described the impact of Mahan's work on US policy as immediate and substantial:

Mahan's message to Americans was that they must now play an international role upon the world scene. To do this, the United States must cease to be an insular continental power and instead become a global force by building up her maritime power. The first step in this process had already been taken: a naval appro-

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30 Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997). The oceans remain vital to international trade; ships transport nearly 90% of the world's goods.

31 Ibid.

priations bill in 1883 had authorized the construction of four steel battleships in American yards, and they had been completed four years later. Mahan's ideas gave this policy a new impetus. Six weeks after the publication of his book, Congress agreed to the construction of three "seagoing, coast-line battleships." With this decision, the United States set out on the path to sea power as Mahan understood, explained, and preached it.<sup>32</sup>

Another of Mahan's works, *The Problem of Asia* (1900), predicted that the conflict between Russian land power and the maritime powers (at that time Britain) would continue, focused around a "Debated and Debatable Middle Strip" in Asia, from China to the Mediterranean Sea between 30 and 40 degrees north latitudes.<sup>33</sup> Historically, Russia had sought to gain access to warm water ports, and Mahan therefore saw Russian expansion as inevitable. This almost-preordained conflict between land and sea powers would occur around the "Debated Middle Strip" in Asia – an area that included the southern half of present-day Central Asia.

### **Sir Halford Mackinder**

Just over a decade after the publication of Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, Sir Halford Mackinder stood before the Royal Geographical Society in London and presented quite a different analysis entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History." Mackinder declared the end to a 400-year long age of exploration and discovery he termed the "Columbian epoch," and that the world could from then on be described as a "closed political system" where events on one side of the globe would have an effect on the other.<sup>34</sup> This transition entailed a shift from the dominance of sea power in the Columbian epoch to the rise of land power in the post-Columbian age, brought about by technological changes such as the railroad.

Much of the broad expanses of Eurasia, rich in natural resources, are inaccessible by ship and therefore impenetrable to sea power. The advent of the railroad enhanced transportation in this region, stretching from Siberia to the edge of modern-day Europe and encompassing the whole of Central Asia, and caused Mackinder to wonder "Is not the

32 John Gooch, "Maritime Command: Mahan and Corbett," in *Seapower and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Roger W. Barnett (London: Tri-service Press, 1994), p. 31.

33 Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy*, p. 91.

34 Halford Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *Geographical Journal*, vol. 23 (1904): 422.

pivot region of the world's politics that vast area of Euro-Asia which is inaccessible to ships, but in antiquity lay open to the horse-riding nomads, and is today about to be covered with a network of railways?"<sup>35</sup> Strategic and well protected, the state controlling this region had an obvious advantage in challenging the traditional maritime powers on its periphery. "In the present condition of the balance of power, the pivot state, Russia, is not equivalent to the peripheral states," wrote Mackinder, but "the oversetting of the balance of power in favor of the pivot state, resulting in its expansion over the marginal lands of Euro-Asia, would permit the use of vast continental resources for fleet-building, and the empire of the world would then be in sight."<sup>36</sup> Mackinder developed and refined his "heartland" concept in later versions, and came to view Eastern Europe as the focal point in the struggle between sea and land power. This belief was embodied in Mackinder's often-repeated phrase: "Who rules East Europe controls the heartland; who rules the heartland commands the World-Island [the entirety of Eurasia]; Who rules the World-Island commands the world."<sup>37</sup>

### **Nicholas Spykman**

Although harboring similar theoretical assumptions as Mackinder about the coming conflict between maritime and continental power, Nicholas Spykman, writing during the Second World War – but already thinking of the post-war geopolitical landscape – argued that the heartland theory was flawed. The heartland itself posed no threat to maritime powers; the area of most concern was in fact the buffer zone (called the "Rimland") between the two where control over the maritime routes encircling the Eurasian land mass would be crucial.<sup>38</sup> Spykman, echoing Mahan, wrote that "one of the basic patterns in the politics of the Old World during the last century was the opposition between the British naval power operating along the circumferential sea route and Russian land-power trying to smash an opening through the encircling ring" to gain access to a warm water port, a goal Russia had pursued unsuccessfully for several centuries, thwarted by "geography and sea power."<sup>39</sup>

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35 Ibid: 434–5.

36 Ibid: 436.

37 Quoted in Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: The Heartland Theory Then and Now," in *Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy*, eds. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London: Frank Cass, 2000), p. 27.

38 Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy*, p. 63.

Echoing the sentiments of Mackinder and Mahan, Spykman recognized that with the USSR's landmass, the "full application of western technology to the resources of the vast territory could develop an economy strong enough to support one of the Great War machines of the twentieth century."<sup>40</sup> Spykman fully intended his ideas to be applied by decision-makers in Washington. The task of US policymakers, then, was to maintain control over the Rimland to prevent the Soviet Union from gaining access to the maritime routes. As Spykman put it, "The Mackinder dictum ... is false. If there is to be a slogan for the power politics of the Old World, it must be 'Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.'"<sup>41</sup>

## **Cold War containment: mixing geopolitics and ideology**

World War Two affected American geopolitical assumptions on two levels. First, the attack on Pearl Harbor changed many Americans' geopolitical beliefs by demonstrating the limitations of oceans as natural defensive barriers. Second, the United States had again been drawn into a war on the Eurasian continent. As Geoffrey Sloan wrote

there is strong evidence to suggest that the Second World War resulted in Roosevelt's perception of the political importance of the Eurasian continent to the security of the United States taking a form which had many similarities with one of the central concepts of Mackinder's heartland theory.

With the strengthened post-war position of the Soviet Union, a confrontation between American sea power and Soviet land power appeared to be in the offing.

It was under these circumstances that George Kennan, a State Department diplomat stationed in Moscow, sent the now famous "Long Telegram" in February 1946, published in article form in the journal *Foreign Affairs* under the pseudonym X in July 1947. In the key pas-

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39 Nickolas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics* (New York:Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1942), p. 182.

40 Ibid.

41 Quoted in Mackubin Thomas Owens, "In Defense of Classical Geopolitics," *Naval War College Review*, vol. LII, no. 4 (autumn 1999).

sage that was to become the framework for US strategy for decades, Kennan wrote: “it is clear that the main element of any United States policy towards the Soviet Union must be that of long-term, patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies.”<sup>42</sup> More specifically, “the Soviet pressure against the free institutions of the western world is something that can be contained by the adroit and vigilant application of counter-force at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points.”<sup>43</sup> This idea of confronting the Soviets at specific strategic points around the globe, a “strongpoint” rather than a “perimeter” defense, allowed the US to pick its battles and use its limited resources most effectively.

Basic containment strategy echoed the concerns of Mahan and Mackinder about the dangers presented by a country controlling the heartland of Eurasia, and paralleled Spykman’s insistence on confronting the Soviets in the buffer zones of the Rimland. Defense of this strategic area was best achieved through a “strongpoint” defense, argued Kennan. In 1949, two hugely significant events – the establishment of Communist China and the development by the Soviets of atomic weapons – led President Truman to authorize a study of how containment could be systematically implemented. A group of State and Defense Department officials drafted what came to be known as NSC-68, what the historian John Lewis Gaddis described as a “single, comprehensive statement of interests, threats, and feasible responses, capable of being communicated throughout the bureaucracy.”<sup>44</sup> The resulting document deviated substantially from the “Long Telegram.” NSC-68’s authors concluded that Kennan’s “strongpoint” defense of the Rimland was insufficient and argued for a “perimeter” defense where all geographic areas had equal strategic value. It was impossible for the US to project an image of confidence and strength when the “strongpoint” defense strategy of picking one’s battles implied a lack of resources to defend the entire perimeter, especially when, according to Gaddis, “world order, and with it American security, had come to depend as much on perceptions of the balance of power as on what that balance actually was.”<sup>45</sup>

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42 George Kennan (X), “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947 [online 17 Nov 2008].

43 Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.”

44 John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 90.

45 Ibid, p. 92.



Throughout the next two decades, US security policy stuck to the basic strategic framework staked out by NSC-68: confronting and containing, by any and all means necessary, the Soviet Union, which signified an existential threat to the United States. The next three administrations, those of Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, each varied in their approaches and strategic solutions, but the main structures in their foreign policies corresponded roughly to those of NSC-68. President Eisenhower introduced the geopolitical concept of falling dominoes, an expansion of the Truman Doctrine (that the US would provide assistance to countries under threat from communist expansionism), whereby the fall of one country to communist influence would lead to a similar occurrence in neighboring countries like falling dominoes. For the US, international communism was indistinguishable from the Soviet threat, and conflicts in the Rimland countries of Korea and Vietnam therefore became crucial to US security. At the same time, the Eisenhower administration employed rhetoric espousing freedom and liberty, conflating the geopolitical contest between the US and the USSR as an ideological battle, thereby shifting the focus away from the actual means by which the conflict was waged.<sup>46</sup>

During the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, containment was pursued more vigorously and less attention was paid to cost/benefit analyses. According to Sloan, “maintaining a line along the entire length of the Eurasian Rimland regardless of the cost of actual political achievements” became the principle strategic goal; containment was “increasingly dictating policy objectives instead of the other way around.”<sup>47</sup> The ideological battle between the two superpowers escalated and became nearly inseparable from the strategic conflict. The United States pursued projects that satisfied not only the idealistic sentiment among Americans, but that also served a strategic purpose. When President Kennedy founded the Peace Corps in 1961, his intention was not only to channel American idealism into improving the living standards in developing countries, but also to counter communist influence. As one scholar has argued,

the Peace Corps represented, in part, an attempt to reorient US foreign policy in the Third World toward economic development ... US political leaders at the time recognized that under-

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<sup>46</sup> Sloan, *Geopolitics in US Strategic Policy*, p. 143–145.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150–152.

developed, newly independent, and highly nationalistic nations were more susceptible to communist influence than were more prosperous nations.<sup>48</sup>

The partnership of President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in 1969 began moving US foreign policy away from the economic development and democracy promotion of the Kennedy and Johnson years. Alone, such goals would not necessarily enhance US security, and their value depended upon the geopolitical context.<sup>49</sup> These adjustments led some to criticize the Nixon and Ford administrations for lacking morality in their foreign policy with its preference for geopolitics and balancing over human rights and democracy.<sup>50</sup> Demonstrating that US grand strategy does not stray far from its ideological component, these two administrations' attempts to pursue a more pragmatic strategy created a sort of domestic backlash.

Indeed, the incoming Carter administration promised another course adjustment from Kissinger's foreign policy of geopolitics to an approach that took more normative concerns into consideration.<sup>51</sup> The human rights aspect of Carter's foreign policy ultimately became more rhetorical in nature as these normative considerations became integrated into the existing geopolitical framework of containment.<sup>52</sup> Just as the grand strategy of the US could not sustain a continued realist-oriented policy, neither could the pendulum swing too far towards a pure ideology-based policy. In 1979, an Islamic revolution in Iran toppled the US-friendly government there and then, later in the year, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan; the Rimland seemed more vulnerable than ever to Soviet dominance. The brief 1973 oil embargo by OPEC provided a poignant reminder of US dependence on petroleum exports from the Middle East, and President Carter responded to the events of 1979 by issuing what came to be known as the Carter Doctrine.

Carter announced the policy in his 1980 State of the Union Address, the text of which was written by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski: "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region

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48 Michael R. Hall, "Impact of the US Peace Corps at Home and Abroad," *Journal of Third World Studies*, (spring 2007) (BNET Research Center [online 1 Nov 2007]).

49 Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, p. 278.

50 Ibid, pp. 336–7.

51 Ibid.

52 Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy*, p. 191.

will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”<sup>53</sup> To this end, the administration established a Rapid Deployment Force based in the US but ready for deployment to the Middle East. In addition, as the Soviets’ actions in Afghanistan were perceived to be a threat to Persian Gulf oil, the US conducted covert operations to fund and support the Afghan mujahedeen.<sup>54</sup> The battle for the Rimland and the defense of American oil supplies combined during the Carter years with ramifications that are still felt today, exemplified by repeated US interventions in the Persian Gulf.

With the Reagan administration came the return of ideological rhetoric. Ironically, Reagan criticized the Carter administration’s human rights focus during the 1980 campaign and initially conducted a pragmatic foreign policy once in office. In 1983, a combination of factors led to the “rediscovery” of human rights issues, but unlike Carter’s focus on government repression and economic disenfranchisement, Reagan emphasized political rights and democratic processes.<sup>55</sup> In addition, Reagan’s support of insurgencies that were fighting communist/Soviet-oriented governments in the developing world combined with strong, consistent rhetoric reflecting the administration’s belief that the battle was an ideological one.<sup>56</sup> This was encapsulated in the Reagan Doctrine of assisting anti-communist insurgencies in an effort to confront the Soviet Union in the Rimland in an attempt to “roll back” the influence of global communism.<sup>57</sup> It entailed a revival of containment theory’s perimeter defense and added as a priority of US policy “to contain and over time reverse Soviet expansionism,” with a particular focus on the developing world.<sup>58</sup>

The US had toned down its aggressive containment policies by Reagan’s second term, argued Sloan, whereby the administration showed “a continuity with the Nixon era, and maintained that geopolitics was an approach that paid attention to the requirements of

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53 Jimmy Carter, 1980 State of the Union Address, *The Jimmy Carter Library and Museum* [online 10 May 2008].

54 Michael Klare, “The Geopolitics of War,” *Nation*, 5 November 2001 [online 10 May 2008].

55 Farheed Zakaria, “The Reagan Strategy of Containment,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 105, no. 3 (1990): 372–395.

56 Ibid.

57 US State Department, “Timeline of US Diplomatic History: Reagan Doctrine” [online 4 Mar 2008].

58 Ibid.

equilibrium.”<sup>59</sup> This change may have come about due to a reassessment of the Soviet threat by the Reagan administration, brought on by a number of factors: recognition of its initial overestimation of the USSR’s military capabilities, a favorable strategic balance due to the US military build-up, and the conciliatory tone of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>60</sup>

## Conceptualizing post-Cold War grand strategy

The 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union during the presidency of George H.W. Bush marked the end of the Cold War and of containment policy, although its premises and ideological foundations continue to reverberate in the present. The patterns of American foreign policy during the Cold War were marked by a combined emphasis on geopolitical and ideological considerations that shaped the perspectives of US policymakers. While each component’s influence on policymakers varied considerably from one administration to the next, the “loss” of the Soviet Union as a framework for policy formulation represented a huge challenge to the United States as it struggled to fill the conceptual and organizational gap left by Cold War policy planning. In addition, the collapse of one of the two superpowers left the United States in a position of unrivaled military and political power. These early attempts at formulating a new strategic concept are crucial to understanding the evolution of US strategic thinking from the end of the Cold War through to the George W. Bush administration.

In late 1989, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, together with Paul Wolfowitz, Lewis “Scooter” Libby and Colin Powell, organized a project tasked with developing a post-Cold War US grand strategy.<sup>61</sup> President Bush delivered the preliminary results in a speech on 2 August 1990 in Aspen, Colorado that was largely overshadowed by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait that same day. In his speech, President Bush emphasized the more *regionalized* and less predictable threats likely to face the US in the future, and argued that the US military should not be reduced beyond what was needed “to guard our enduring interests – the forces to exercise forward presence in key areas, to respond effectively to crisis, to retain the national capacity to rebuild our forces

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59 Sloan, *Geopolitics in United States Strategic Policy*, p. 197.

60 Zakaria, “The Reagan Strategy of Containment.”

61 Ibid.

should this be needed.”<sup>62</sup> A month later, President Bush addressed a joint session of Congress and presented his case for the coming conflict with Iraq. While Bush acknowledged the importance of protecting the supply of oil from the Middle East, he also noted that the crisis in the Persian Gulf offered “a rare opportunity to move toward an historic period of cooperation. Out of these troubled times ... a new world order can emerge.”

This *new world order* was one in which “the rule of law supplants the rule of the jungle,” “nations recognize the shared responsibility for freedom and justice,” and in which “the strong respect the rights of the weak.” While Bush claimed that “recent events have surely proven that there is no substitute for American leadership,” his vision clearly involved some type of multilateral framework grounded in international law. Bush welcomed the United Nations’ actions with regard to Kuwait, saying “we’re now in sight of a United Nations that performs as envisioned by its founders ... The United Nations is backing up its words with action.”<sup>63</sup>

Bush’s speech seemed at odds with the results of Cheney and Wolfowitz’s grand strategy group. In March 1992, less than a month before the publication of the group’s findings as the “Defense Planning Guidance for the fiscal years 1994–1999” (DPG), a draft copy of the report was provided to the *New York Times*.<sup>64</sup> According to the *Times*, the new strategy had as its fundamental principle that of US primacy: “our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival.”<sup>65</sup> A second objective was to address regional threats and conflicts, especially in areas involving US interests such as oil, nuclear proliferation, or narcotics trafficking. This regional focus was designed to increase respect for international law, limit conflicts, and “encourage the spread of democratic forms of government and open economic systems.” The DPG considered it “improbable that a global conventional challenge to US and Western security will reemerge from the Eurasian heartland for many years to come.” Further, the draft strategy shunned collective action through the United Nations in favor of objective-focused “ad-hoc assemblies,” but also refused to rule out unilateral action – that the

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62 George H.W. Bush, “Remarks at the Aspen Institute Symposium in Aspen Colorado, 2 August 1990,” *The American Presidency Project* (University of California [online 12 Feb 2007]).

63 Cheney, “Defense Strategy for the 1990s.”

64 Patrick E. Tyler, “US Strategy Plan Calls for Insuring No Rivals Develop A One-Superpower World,” *New York Times*, 8 March 1992.

65 Quoted in Tyler, “US Strategic Plan ....”

US “should be postured to act independently when collective action cannot be orchestrated.”<sup>66</sup>

The leaked DPG draft was poorly received and widely criticized from all sides. A reworked and softened version of the DPG again resurfaced in the final days of the Bush administration, after an unexpected defeat to Bill Clinton. Despite the fact that it would never become official policy, Defense Secretary Cheney released “Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy” in January 1993. Cheney’s Regional Defense proposal stated clearly the author’s intention of instituting a new grand strategic concept: “Our national strategy has shifted from a focus on a global threat to one on regional challenges and opportunities. We have moved from Containment to the new Regional Defense Strategy.”<sup>67</sup> The alliance of democratic nations developed during the Cold War, referred to repeatedly in the document as the “democratic zone of peace,” provided the US with strategic depth and would play a key role in US strategy.<sup>68</sup> Within this regional security framework, hostile non-democratic nations must be prevented from dominating regions deemed critical to US interests and a clear military presence must be established in some regions to accomplish this goal.

Also similar to the DPG, the Regional Defense proposal expressed hope that collective action might solve future security issues, but recognized that a “collective effort will not always be timely and, in the absence of US leadership, may not gel. Where the stakes so merit, we must have forces ready to protect our critical interests.”<sup>69</sup> This strategy and the concepts and proposals it contained would be, in effect, placed on a shelf and reopened when President Bush’s son was elected president. The strategic thinking expressed during the final months of the Bush administration contributes much to understanding the strategic direction and underlying logic of the George W. Bush administration.

Bill Clinton’s election victory in 1992 ushered in a period of strong rhetorical support for multilateralism and economic issues. During the election campaign, Clinton had outlined three main foreign policy goals: restructuring the US military, increasing the role of economics in world affairs, and promoting democracy.<sup>70</sup> In August

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66 Ibid.

67 Dick Cheney, “Defense Strategy for the 1990s: The Regional Defense Strategy,” January 1993, *Information Clearing House* [online 14 Feb 2007].

68 The document defined this “democratic zone of peace” as “a community of democratic nations bound together by a web of political, economic, and security ties.”

69 Cheney, “Defense Strategy for the 1990s.”

1993, Clinton tasked National Security Advisor Anthony Lake with creating a group to generate a word or slogan similar to “containment” that encompassed the three foreign policy goals from the campaign. Lake set to work to find an image and a strategy that would “merge strands of neo-Wilsonian idealism with hardcore Morgenthauian realism.”<sup>71</sup> A month later, Lake announced a new grand strategy based on the concept of enlargement: “The successor to a doctrine of containment must be a strategy of enlargement – enlargement of the world’s free community of market democracies.”<sup>72</sup> He identified four components of the new strategy: “strengthen the community of major market economies,” “foster and consolidate new democracies,” “counter the aggression . . . of states hostile to democracy and markets,” and “pursue our humanitarian agenda.”<sup>73</sup>

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of 1995, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement,” exemplified Clinton’s three-pronged strategy of enhancing US security, encouraging US economic prosperity and promoting democracy.<sup>74</sup> Notably, successive NSS documents also emphasized economic issues and argued that external threats to national security were increasingly linked to those from within the US, that “domestic and foreign policies are increasingly blurred.”<sup>75</sup> Within this framework, economic issues and democracy promotion were elevated to a level on a par with the more “traditional” areas of security policy encompassing mostly military issues.

Some analysts categorize US grand strategy under the early post-Cold War administrations of Bill Clinton and his predecessor, George H.W. Bush, as generally multilateral yet geared towards primacy.<sup>76</sup> According to Stephen Walt, both administrations “sought to enhance the US position in the world while preserving the alliances, institutional commitments, and broad multilateralist approaches that had

70 Douglas Brinkley, “Democratic Enlargement: The Clinton Doctrine,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 106 (spring 1997) [online 3 Apr 2008]: 110–127.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 115. This project became known as the “Kennan Sweepstakes.”

72 Anthony Lake, “From Containment to Enlargement,” speech at Johns Hopkins University, 27 September 1993 (Mount Holyoke College [18 Nov 2008]).

73 *Ibid.*

74 William Jefferson Clinton, “A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement,” *GlobalSecurity.org*, February 1995 [online 1 Apr 2008].

75 Clinton, William Jefferson: “A National Security Strategy for a New Century,” *The White House*, February 1998 (GlobalSecurity.org [online 10 Nov 2007]), p. 7; William Jefferson Clinton, “A National Security Strategy for a Global Age,” *The White House*, December 2000 (GlobalSecurity.org [online 10 Nov 2007]).

76 G. John Ikenberry, “American Grand Strategy in the Age of Terror,” *Survival*, vol. 43, no. 4 (winter 2001–2002): 25.

won the Cold War.”<sup>77</sup> Both administrations maintained a preponderance of US forces throughout the world with a focus on reacting quickly to preserve regional security, both also supported a strong North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). An explicit strategic policy of hindering the rise of a peer competitor, like that of the DPG leaked in 1992, was never enunciated, though both the multilateral focus and attention to regional issues were designed to prevent the rise of any global threats.<sup>78</sup>

Barry Posen and Andrew Ross saw conflicting pressures in the Clinton administration’s agenda. It was ambitious and activist, but could not be achieved without exercising US leadership and power. The Clinton strategy, according to Posen and Ross, blended elements of cooperative security, selective engagement, and primacy grand strategies. They presciently observed that “this ad hoc approach is probably inevitable until a crisis impels a choice. And a failure to develop a clearer consensus on grand strategy may hasten the arrival of that crisis.”<sup>79</sup> Without the overarching strategic framework of Cold War containment, the new security environment allowed the US to begin adapting to changing realities. The continued integration of – and increasing emphasis on – ideology as a component of US grand strategy was evident after the end of the Cold War. This thinking would be strongly amplified during the George W. Bush administration.

After their victory in the 2000 election, the Bush Administration assembled a formidable foreign policy team including Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Paul Wolfowitz, and Richard Armitage. These and other key administration officials held starkly differing views on US foreign policy and grand strategy. Some backed the pragmatic and selective engagement course advocated by Bush and Condoleezza Rice during the 2000 election campaign, while others supported an expansionist, primacy-oriented and ideologically driven strategy seen in the 1993 Defense Planning Guidance, Cheney’s 1993 defense document, and the policy papers published by the *Project for a New American Century* (PNAC).<sup>80</sup> As Svein Melby observed, this funda-

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77 Walt, *Taming American Power*, p. 57.

78 For the Bush Administration, see Svein Melby, “Tendenser i amerikansk forsvarsdebatt” [Trends in American defense debate], *Det sikkerhetspolitiske bibliotek*, no. 10 (1992): 13; For Clinton, see Barry Posen and Andrew Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy” in *America’s Strategic Choices*, eds. Michael E. Brown et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

79 Posen and Ross, “Competing Visions for US Grand Strategy,” p. 49.



mental disagreement over policy caused a tension within the administration that could not last. Many commentators predicted that President Bush would be most influenced by the realists and follow the course laid out by his father.<sup>81</sup>

The terrorist attack on 11 September 2001 caused a reshuffling of grand strategic priorities within the White House, opening the door for the more expansionist-minded figures in the administration such as Cheney, Wolfowitz and Rumsfeld to steer US policy.<sup>82</sup> Advocates of an aggressive response that entailed the revamping of US grand strategy from the selective global engagement of US forces to one of primacy clearly succeeded, and the resulting course adjustment was profound. This is not to say that these figures, with their links to neoconservative policy institutes, “hijacked” US foreign policy. None of the themes in the 1992 DPG, the 1993 defense document, or the 2000 PNAC proposal contained wholly new and radical concepts; American primacy, promotion of democratic principles, and even pre-emptive war were elements of previous US grand strategies. Instead, the new direction taken by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11 simply collected these strands of policy together and forcefully pursued them in a new and aggressive manner, and in a way that resonated with the American public. The shock of sustaining such a significant attack on US soil, along with the generally uncertain nature of the terrorist threat, allowed a much more proactive strategy to be adopted with broad support from the general public.

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80 This think tank, politically oriented toward what is known as a neoconservative ideology, kept alive the spirit and tradition of the leaked Wolfowitz 1992 DPG, and its *Rebuilding America's Defenses* (2000) specifically endorsed the document. Many key Bush administration officials had signed under PNAC's report, including Rumsfeld, Cheney, Wolfowitz, Armitage, Douglas Feith, John Bolton, Elliot Abrams, and Lewis “Scooter” Libby, see Dueck, “Ideas and alternatives,” p. 526.

81 Svein Melby, *Bush-revolusjonen i amerikansk utenrikspolitikk* [The Bush revolution in US foreign policy] (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2004), pp. 62–3. Dueck outlines a similar division in foreign policy thinking in “Ideas and alternatives,” p. 525.

82 Melby, *Bush-revolusjonen*, pp. 129–137; Dueck “Ideas and alternatives,” p. 525.



# Grand strategy under the Bush administration

## Enduring interests and threats

A notable feature of the post-Cold War era is the continuity in the US national interests stated in the various strategic documents since 1991.<sup>83</sup> In many regards, these core national interests have not changed substantially since 1945. Beyond the primary interest of ensuring the survival of the country and its institutions, the interests upon which US grand strategy have been built may be grouped into four categories. First and most basic is the protection of the US and its citizens from physical threats of aggression from other states and non-state entities such as terrorist groups. Second, the US must ensure the country's continued economic strength by promoting international trade and US access to global markets as well as strategic resources. Third, relations with allies and other friendly nations must be maintained. Finally, the US has an enduring interest in spreading democracy and liberal ideals.<sup>84</sup>

Just as the set of core US interests has remained constant, so too has the set of perceived threats to those interests. In a recent analysis of US grand strategy, Stephen Biddle compared the threat perceptions contained in security documents from both the Clinton and George

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83 Portions of this chapter on US grand strategy, as well as parts of the next chapter detailing its implementation, have been published in an earlier work. See Michael Mayer, *Forecasting Risk: Climate Change and US Security*, Oslo Files on Defence and Security, no. 6 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2007).

84 Compiled from: George H.W. Bush, *National Security Strategy of the United States*, August 1991, *Federation of American Scientists* [online 18 Nov]; Les Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-up Review," October 1993, *Federation of American Scientists* [online 13 May 2008]; Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*; Rumsfeld, Donald: *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001*, Department of Defense, September 2001, (Commonwealth Institute [online 18 Nov 2008]); George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States*, September 2002, *GlobalSecurity.org* [online 2 April 2008]. The final two documents will hereafter be referred to as QDR 2001 and NSS 2002, respectively.

W. Bush administrations. The lists were remarkably similar, and Biddle found that “few truly new threats ... have appeared in the last decade, and few have disappeared. Their relative severity has changed ... but the list has not.”<sup>85</sup> Threats included a potential peer competitor, rogue states, proliferation, terrorism, transnational crime, and regional crises or state failure. While the interests and threats may exhibit a reasonable degree of consistency, however, the grand strategic plan to combat these threats and secure US national interests underwent an adjustment after 9/11. Rather than Clinton’s “selective/cooperative primacy,” the new Bush administration dispelled any illusions about the willingness of the US to wield its massive military power, and began to pursue a strategy of global primacy.

## Overarching strategic thinking

The first formal strategy document issued by the Bush administration after 9/11 was the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS).<sup>86</sup> In an interview just prior to its release, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice stated her belief that 9/11 had redefined the role of the United States and compared the months after the attacks to the post-World War Two period when the strategy of containment was conceived.<sup>87</sup> Rice stressed the importance of the document, saying it would be “a real statement of what the Bush Administration sees as the strategic direction that it’s going.”<sup>88</sup> In the eyes of many analysts, the 2002 NSS represented a small revolution in strategic thinking and laid the foundation for the new direction in US grand strategy. Later documents, including the 2004 National Military Strategy, the 2005 and 2008 National Defense Strategy, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), and the 2006 National Security Strategy have made adjustments and refinements to the strategy.<sup>89</sup> In its final form, the grand

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85 Biddle, “American Grand Strategy,” p. 4.

86 The documents referred to in this section include the National Security Strategy (NSS), issued by the White House and authored by the National Security Council, which lays out the nation’s security challenges. The National Defense Strategy (NDS) operationalizes the security strategy, and the National Military Strategy (NMS) then identifies the specific military means to meet the challenges laid out in the NSS. The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) lays out how the US military will address the nation’s security challenges 20 years in the future. For more information on the institutional structure regarding these documents, see J. Boone Bartholomees Jr., ed., *US Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Carlisle: US Army War College, 2006) (Strategic Studies Institute [online 7 Nov 2008]).

87 Nicholas Lemann, “The Next World Order,” *New Yorker*, 1 April 2002.

88 Quoted in Lemann, “The Next World Order.”

strategy developed under President Bush combines elements from previous strategic concepts in a new and all-encompassing manner that is highly ambitious in scope. The following sketch of US grand strategy will provide a general overview; an examination of the military, political, and economic components of grand strategy as implemented will be covered in the next chapter.

## The strategic environment

Understanding the contours of the international system, within which US political, economic and military policies must function, is a fundamental component of strategic decision making. Decisions must be made based upon expectations of future developments and how specific policies should be tailored to create the desired political result. Among the most prominent institutes and government agencies actively involved in analyzing international trends with strategic relevance, substantial convergence can be seen on a number of fronts. These reports outline a future characterized by interrelated economic, social, cultural, political and climactic trends that combine in undesirable and unpredictable ways.

The 2004 report from the National Intelligence Council, *Mapping the Global Future*, painted a generally disorganized picture of the world. It predicted the continued economic and political rise of regional powers such as China and India, “pervasive insecurity” marked by instability across southern Asia, the Middle East and Africa, where “weak governments, lagging economies, religious extremism, and youth bulges will align to create a perfect storm for internal conflict,” and the continued prevalence of the underlying factors motivating international terrorism. International institutions such as the United Nations and global financial institutions are in danger of being overwhelmed and risk becoming irrelevant if they fail to adapt to new challenges, while nation-states will struggle to cope with economic, demographic and cultural trends.

The latest version of the report sees a marked decline in American political and economic dominance; continued US military superiority “will be the least significant asset in the increasingly competitive

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89 This analysis of the current grand strategy will take into account all of these documents, which range in scope from general concepts to the specific operationalizations derived from them, and incorporates budget priorities, base reorientation, military restructuring and diplomatic initiatives as supporting evidence.

world of the future.”<sup>90</sup> As Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Dr. Thomas Fingar stated that “we’re probably going to be playing with fewer cards. The face value of the cards will be diminished. There will be more players in the game.”<sup>91</sup> At the same time, adverse weather conditions induced by climate change and shortages of food and fresh water could prove devastating for already weakened governments in the most affected regions.<sup>92</sup>

Military analyses, such as the Joint Forces Command’s *Joint Operating Environment* white paper, reach similar conclusions about the trends outlined above.<sup>93</sup> The latest National Defense Strategy published in June 2008 predicted that the continued existence of violent extremist groups operating in weak or failing states can destabilize key regions. The document acknowledges that “over the next twenty years physical pressures – population, resources, energy, climatic and environment – could combine with rapid social, cultural, technological and geopolitical change to create greater uncertainty.” It warned that population growth in the developing world and an ageing population in the developed world, interacting with “existing and future resource, environmental, and climate pressures may generate new security challenges.” The rough outlines of a preliminary response to these challenges can already be seen in US strategic thinking, combining the maintenance of US military superiority with an increased awareness of the asymmetrical and irregular threats it faces.

## A grand strategy of primacy

The most fundamental aspect of US grand strategy has been the Bush administration’s clear intention to pursue a strategy of global primacy. Whereas the two previous administrations sought to retain some aspects of multilateralism or internationalism in their policies while recognizing and utilizing America’s unique position as the world’s remaining superpower, the Bush White House proclaimed openly and clearly its intention to reinforce and enhance US superiority and retain

90 Joby Warrick and Walter Pincus, “Reduced dominance is Predicted for US,” *Washington Post*, 10 September 2008 [online 18 Nov 2008].

91 Thomas Fingar, “Remarks and Q&A by the Deputy Director of National Intelligence for Analysis & Chairman National Intelligence Council,” 2008 INSA Analytic and Transformation Conference, Orlando Florida, 4 September 2008 (Office of the Director of National Intelligence [online 2 Nov 2008]).

92 Warrick and Pincus, “Reduced Dominance.”

93 United States Joint Forces Command, *Joint Operating Environment: Trends and Challenges for the Future Joint Force through 2030*, December 2007 [online 21 Nov 2008].

its freedom of strategic action. The 2002 and 2006 security strategies used nearly identical language in claiming that “our forces will be strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States.”<sup>94</sup> The 2004 NMS stated that “the goal is full spectrum dominance (FSD) – the ability to control any situation or defeat any adversary across the range of military operations.”<sup>95</sup> The 2006 QDR confirmed the continued relevance of this strategy, proclaiming that the US will “seek to ensure that no foreign power can dictate the terms of regional or global security. It will attempt to dissuade any military competitor from developing disruptive or other capabilities that could enable regional hegemony or hostile action against the United States or other friendly countries.”<sup>96</sup>

While the grand strategy of primacy has a global focus, its implementation follows the regional approaches first voiced in the 1990s. The US seeks not only to pursue its objectives in important strategic regions, but also to retain the freedom to pursue its interests in every region. As noted in the 2004 NDS, the US military “must work to secure strategic access to key regions, lines of communication and the “global commons” of international waters, airspace, space and cyberspace.”<sup>97</sup> The 2006 QDR added that “The United States will continue to adapt its global posture to promote constructive bilateral relations, mitigate anti-access threats and offset potential political coercion designed to limit US access to any region.”<sup>98</sup> While the utility of institutional frameworks such as NATO is repeatedly acknowledged, the more ambiguous term “allies and partners” punctuated the 2006 QDR. This may signal a reliance on bilateral relationships and coalitions of the willing rather than a desire to pursue US interests through a multilateral framework. In this way, Washington’s freedom of action is assured, unencumbered by institutional commitments and restraints.

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94 NSS 2002, p. 30.

95 Richard Myers, “The National Military Strategy of the United States 2004,” *GlobalSecurity.org* [online 2 Apr 2008], p. 23. Hereafter NMS 2004

96 Donald Rumsfeld, “Quadrennial Defense Review 2006,” Department of Defense, February 2006, *GlobalSecurity.org* [online 18 Nov 2008], p. 30. Hereafter QDR 2006.

97 *Ibid.*, p. 1.

98 QDR 2006, p. 30.

### **Dual focus: peer competitors and unstable regions**

This expanded focus illustrates the dualistic nature of a grand strategy that views the greatest short term and immediate threats as emanating from weak and failing states, while remaining vigilant against future great power threats from a rising China and a resurgent Russia. The US seeks to shape the strategic course of China through political engagement as well as a conventional containment strategy that incorporates a loose cooperative alliance with Asian actors such as India, Australia and Japan. The strategic relationship with China is viewed as “long-term and multi-dimensional,” and as seeking cooperation while investing resources in ways that “favor key enduring US strategic advantages.”<sup>99</sup>

The US military establishment continues to anticipate future conflict scenarios with China and Russia, and military weapons systems acquisitions reflect a continued emphasis on large-scale conventional warfare.<sup>100</sup> The conflict between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 served as yet another sign of Moscow’s renewed assertiveness, while US policymakers remain skeptical of Russia’s ability to challenge American military and economic power. As Secretary Gates suggested, “The images of Russian tanks rolling into the Republic of Georgia last month was a reminder that nation states and their militaries do still matter,” but that “the Russian conventional military ... remains a shadow of its Soviet predecessor. And Russian demographics will likely impede its numbers getting much larger.”<sup>101</sup> While no immediate challenge to US military superiority can be seen over the next several decades, the US remains committed to retaining its advantage in waging traditional maneuver warfare.

At the same time, the Bush administration has presided over a massive reorientation within the State Department and the Pentagon towards threats emerging from within states. The challenges in addressing such threats have led to a substantial shift in strategic thinking that goes well beyond the war on terror to include a range of threats such as proliferation, international narcotics trafficking, organized criminal networks, and general instability and insecurity in re-

99 Donald Rumsfeld, “The National Defense Strategy of the United States,” March 2005, *GlobalSecurity.org* [online 18 Nov 2008], p. 3, 10. Hereafter referred to as NDS 2005.

100 The details of this strategy will be discussed in the following section on implemented strategy.

101 Robert Gates, “The Future of American Military Power,” speech at National Defense University, Washington DC, 29 September 2008, *RealClearWorld.com* [online 18 Nov].



gions considered vital to US interests. As President Bush stated in his introduction of the 2002 NSS, “The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states.” The first page of the strategy itself further developed this thinking: “America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones. We are menaced less by fleets and armies than by catastrophic technologies in the hands of the embittered few.”<sup>102</sup>

Four years after the NSS was issued, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reconfirmed this new strategic outlook in a January 2006 speech at Georgetown University:

Since its creation more than 350 years ago, the modern state system has rested on the concept of sovereignty. It was always assumed that every state could control and direct the threats emerging from its territory. It was also assumed that weak and poorly governed states were merely a burden to their people, or at most, an international humanitarian concern but never a true security threat.

Today, however, these old assumptions no longer hold. Technology is collapsing the distance that once clearly separated right here from over there. And the greatest threats now emerge more within states than between them. The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power. In this world it is impossible to draw neat, clear lines between our security interests, our development efforts and our democratic ideals.<sup>103</sup>

In congressional testimony on 10 May 2007, Secretary Rice elucidated this point by arguing that:

The defining feature of our world today is its interdependence. The security of the American people depends on the stability and the success of foreign societies. If governments cannot, or choose not, to meet their responsibilities as sovereign states, nations around the globe are threatened by the resulting chaos and disorder. The President believes that the defense of our

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102 NSS 2002, p. 1.

103 Condoleezza Rice, “Transformational Diplomacy,” speech at Georgetown University, Washington DC, 16 January 2006 (US State Department [18 Nov 2008]).

country depends on the close integration of our multilateral diplomacy, our development efforts, and our support for human rights and democratic institutions.<sup>104</sup>

The administration's rhetoric relating to rogue states and the "Axis of Evil" is in line with this view of interdependence and regime character. Although a substantial amount of attention is given to emerging or re-emerging powers such as China and Russia, equal attention is also given to threats originating from inside other sovereign states, thereby legitimizing an active US role in the internal affairs of other nations. While these adjustments to US strategic posture are most closely identified with the Bush administration's war on terror, trends in strategic thinking among policymakers and military strategists reflect an evolving US threat perception, one that continues to be institutionally solidified within the Defense and State departments.

### ***Terrorism and failed states***

In the 2002 NSS, President Bush acknowledged the country's "unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence," and announced that the US will seek to

create a balance of power that favors human freedom ... we will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.<sup>105</sup>

Written in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the document is punctuated by the threat from international terrorism and "rogue states" that support it; combating these threats is recognized as the primary security challenge facing the United States. This focus on violent Islamic extremism, more than anything else, defined the Bush administration's strategic thinking. The United States, as the Bush administration has often emphasized, takes an offensive posture in the war on terror, choosing to fight the threat abroad in order to avoid attacks on the homeland. In this context, the US emphasizing mobility and rapid response in its overseas deployments to areas where terror organizations

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104 Condoleezza Rice, "Resources for Transformational Diplomacy," statement before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Foreign Operations, 10 May 2007 (US State Department [online 19 Feb 2008]).

105 NSS 2002, Introduction.

are based has become prevalent, and the US has engaged in active military operations attacking countries with links to terrorism as well as suspected camps and terror cells.

US officials argue that this type of conflict, pitting a state against a global network of non-state actors, forces the United States to act quickly and in ways not necessarily coordinated with allies or others in the international community. The 2002 NSS echoed the 1992 DPG and the 1993 Regional Security Strategy by claiming the necessity of unilateral action: “while the United States will constantly strive to enlist the support of the international community, we will not hesitate to act alone, if necessary, to exercise our right of self-defense by acting preemptively against such terrorists.”<sup>106</sup> In a controversial tactical response to this threat, the Bush administration stated its intention to include preventative war as part of its strategic posture, arguing that “traditional concepts of deterrence will not work against a terrorist enemy.”<sup>107</sup> The 2003 war in Iraq demonstrated the Bush administration’s commitment to this principle, as concerns about WMDs combined with the “character” of the Hussein regime, as Rice would have phrased it, and a set of other strategic interests ultimately led to the US-led invasion. In a similar vein, the US renewed its commitment to constructing a ballistic missile defense system against terrorist groups and rogue states. In addition to providing “in-depth” homeland defense, missile defense may counteract any eventuality in which US strategic options were limited due to the deterrent value of these weapons if wielded by “rogue” states such as Iran.

Policymakers have learned that military action alone cannot adequately address the threat posed by violent extremism. In this way, the tactical military response in the war on terror has shifted, as noted by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2008:

In the campaign against terrorist networks and other extremists, we know that direct military force will continue to have a role. But over the long term, we cannot kill or capture our way to victory. What the Pentagon calls “kinetic” operations should be

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 6.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 15. The Bush administration here conflates preemptive war with preventative war. While international law supports action against an imminent threat, the secrecy involved in terrorist plots prevents any certain knowledge of an attack before it is carried out. In this way, the US sees preventative war as a justifiable response to this dilemma. For more on this, see Johannes Rø, *Hva er rettferdig krig i et asymmetrisk trusselbilde?* [What is just war in an asymmetrical threat environment?], IFS Info, no. 4 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2006).

subordinate to measures to promote participation in government, economic programs to spur development, and efforts to address the grievances that often lie at the heart of insurgencies.

Echoing the reports on the future strategic environment mentioned earlier, Secretary Gates continued by observing that

We also know that over the next 20 years and more certain pressures – population, resource, energy, climate, economic and environmental – could combine with rapid cultural, social, and technological change to produce new sources of deprivation, rage, and instability. We face now, and will inevitably face in the future, rising powers discontented with the international status quo, possessing new wealth and ambition, and seeking new and more powerful weapons. *But overall, looking ahead, I believe the most persistent and potentially dangerous threats will come less from ambitious states, than failing ones that cannot meet the basic needs – much less the aspirations – of their people.*<sup>108</sup>

## **The ideological component: democracy and good governance**

The Bush administration has demonstrated an active rhetorical and diplomatic commitment to this reoccurring theme in US strategic thinking of expanding the zone of democracy and good governance. In the US conceptualization of the global war on terror, the ideological component that has consistently accompanied US grand strategy plays an active role in addressing some of the root causes of terrorism. In this perspective, aspects of the war in Iraq, far from being a diversion in the war on terror as many argue, can be seen as consistent with US grand strategy. The rise of al-Qaeda stemmed from autocratic leaders in the Middle East who generated frustration among the disaffected classes. These groups then vented their anger toward foreign targets, a redirection that was less threatening to, and therefore encouraged by, the Middle Eastern autocrats.

Thus, one long-term solution to this problem lies in spreading democracy in the Middle East. The Bush administration, believing in a domino-like spread of democratic values, chose Iraq as the first step in

<sup>108</sup> Robert Gates, speech to the US Global Leadership Campaign, 15 July 2008, *Defenselink* (US Department of Defense [online 18 Nov 2008]), italics mine.

a process of changing the political dynamics of the region.<sup>109</sup> This wave of freedom, with implications beyond the Middle East, is seen by this administration, as have previous ones, as a global strategic interest based partly on the tenets of the democratic peace theory and partly on the grounds that liberal political institutions are linked with open markets that benefit the US economically. Such reasoning is not limited to the Bush administration, though the rhetoric from the White House has been heavily laced with democratic idealism.

In a much less conspicuous manner, President Bush gradually began to follow the precedent of earlier administrations by focusing in many countries on the fundamental building blocks of a democratic society and good governance practices. Non-governmental organizations have been funded to address economic inequality, community organizing at local levels, the independence of media outlets, and the strengthening of the rule of law. Support for such grassroots efforts within the target countries has, however, been weakened due to a backlash against the more aggressive efforts to bring about democratic change in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union (the so-called Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan). Nevertheless, a return to this type of capacity-building work is evident in US policy.

The idea of American *exceptionalism* impacts on this ideological aspect of US policy in several ways, one of them being the belief that US power will only be used for the benefit of the international system. As the 2006 QDR states, the US military is a “force for good” in the world, echoing Colin Powell’s 1991 testimony before Congress in which he argued that allies would not fear US military power because it was “power that could be trusted.”<sup>110</sup> Jonathan Monten, tracing grand strategic beliefs and the logic of primacy, notes that “Bush believes that US power is inherently benign and virtuous.”<sup>111</sup> Because the Bush administration sees its political values as universal, there is a tendency to “conflate US national interests with what they assert to be common, public interests,” and that since the exercise of US power promotes international order and stability, “primacy requires the United States to both set rules and be above them.”<sup>112</sup>

109 Biddle, *American Grand Strategy after 9/11*, p. 22–23; Gaddis, “A Grand Strategy of Transformation.”

110 QDR 2006, p. 9; quoted in David Armstrong, “Dick Cheney’s Song of America,” *Harper’s Magazine*, October 2002 [online 10 Feb 2007].

111 Jonathan Monten, “Primacy and Grand Strategic Beliefs in US Unilateralism,” *Global Governance*, no. 13 (2007): 119–138.

As Robert Jervis writes, “in the Bush doctrine, there are no universal norms or rules governing all states. On the contrary, order can be maintained only if the dominant power behaves quite differently from the others ... American security, world stability, and the spread of liberalism require the United States to act in ways others cannot and must not. This is not a double standard, but is what world order requires.”<sup>113</sup> This attitude necessarily affects diplomatic policy positions as well as attitudes toward international laws and institutions. US officials seem genuinely convinced – as do a sizeable portion of the American public – that the US has a special role to play in the world: one grounded in ideology, assuming the universality of its values, and accepting American unilateral action to promote them. In many respects, the US sees itself as the international security guarantor of last resort. As Barack Obama noted during his presidential campaign, “I still believe that America is the last, best hope of Earth. We just have to show the world why this is so.”<sup>114</sup>

## **The geopolitical component: shifting focus to the arc of instability**

The US military’s overseas presence, a holdover from its global Cold War posture, has played a crucial role in American grand strategy. Not only do the hundreds of military installations located in nearly every region of the world allow the US to respond quickly to crises, their presence assists in shaping the strategic situation in those regions deemed especially vital to US interests. As a 2005 review of the Pentagon’s basing strategy noted, “We cannot hope for much influence without presence – the degree of influence often correlates to the level of permanent presence that we maintain forward.”<sup>115</sup> This global forward posture assists the US in shaping the strategic environment and preventing the rise of a peer or near-peer competitor.

As Wolfowitz wrote in the leaked 1992 DPG, the US must “prevent any hostile power from dominating a region whose resources would, under consolidated control, be sufficient to generate global power.”<sup>116</sup> Wolfowitz, echoing Mackinder and Spykman, listed these

112 Ibid.

113 Jervis, “Understanding the Bush Doctrine”: 276.

114 Barack Obama, “Remarks of Senator Barack Obama to the Chicago Council on Global Affairs,” 24 April 2007. [online 20 Nov 2008]

115 Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structures of the United States, Final Report to Congress, 15 August 2005 [online 21 Nov 2008], p. 8.

regions as Western Europe, East Asia, the territory of the former Soviet Union, and Southwest Asia. As late as the 2005 NDS, these four regions were deemed key, but the 2006 QDR called for an adjustment:

U.S. forces must continue to operate in forward areas, but operational demands over the past four years demonstrate the need to operate around the globe and not only in and from the four regions called out in the 2001 QDR (Europe, the Middle East, the Asian Littoral, and Northeast Asia).<sup>117</sup>

The strategic requirement of unfettered global access, combined with increased attention to non-state actors, rogue states, and the instrumental use of ideology to address these threats, necessitated a shift in worldwide US military posture and strategic focus. In this regard, the idea of “exporting security” espoused by strategist Thomas Barnett is particularly relevant. Barnett argued that the US, as the hegemonic leader of the “functioning core” countries integrated through political and economic liberalization, should seek to provide security and order in those regions that are disconnected from the liberalizing effects of globalization, called the “non-integrating gap,” and strive to integrate these countries into the “core.”

Barnett created his map delineating the “core” and the “gap” based on a database of US military operations from 1990–2003, finding that most of the Pentagon’s “business” lay in an area stretching from northern South America, across Africa, to the Middle East, Central Asia, and most of southeast Asia.<sup>118</sup> This bears a striking resemblance to the arc of instability, a term that surfaced in Defense Secretary Rumsfeld’s 2002 annual report to Congress in which he stated that:

Along a broad arc of instability that stretches from the Middle East to Northeast Asia, there exists a volatile mix of rising and declining regional powers. The governments of some of these states are vulnerable to radical or extremist internal political forces or movements. Many of these states field large militaries and already have or possess the potential to acquire nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons. Analyses of regimes continue to

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116 Tyler, “US Strategic Plan ...”

117 QDR 2006, p. 36.

118 Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004), pp. 144–150.

support global terrorist organizations and to terrorize their own people.<sup>119</sup>

The arc of instability appeared again in the 2004 NMS, having expanded to its current usage as referring to an area more along the lines of Barnett's gap:

There exists an 'arc of instability' stretching from the Western Hemisphere, through Africa and the Middle East and extending to Asia. There are areas in this arc that serve as breeding grounds for threats to our interests. Within these areas rogue states provide sanctuary to terrorists, protecting them from surveillance and attack.<sup>120</sup>

Several characteristics of this area are worth noting. First, the geographic range of Islam stretches across nearly the entirety of the arc; Islamic terrorist groups and countries that may harbor them will undoubtedly be found primarily within this region. Second, the overwhelming majority of states located within the arc are either autocracies or weak/failed states. Washington's focus on regional instability and internal threats combines naturally with the spreading of liberal values and democracy in this region. Notably, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres warned in 2008 that the worst refugee crises will be found within an "arc of crisis" that stretched from the Horn of Africa across the Middle East and into Southwest Asia.<sup>121</sup>

Third, the likely effects of climate change will affect countries within the arc in a much more negative way. The *DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme* recently released a report containing a map of likely "stress zones" in which instability would be greatest.<sup>122</sup> It is in these areas that the environmental impact of climate change will be most acutely felt. In a 2007 report, retired general Anthony Zinni argued that climate change and terror are closely linked:

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119 Donald Rumsfeld, Annual Report to the President and to Congress, 2002 (Nuclear Threat Initiative [online 18 Nov 2008]).

120 NMS 2004, p. 5.

121 Sarah Garland, "As if the Economic News is Not Bad Enough, War is Up too," *Newsweek*, 3 November 2008 [online 18 Nov 2008].

122 UK Ministry of Defense, Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre, "Global Strategic Trends Program 2007–2036 Third Edition," December 2006, *DCDC Strategic Trends* [online 18 Nov 2008], p. 5.



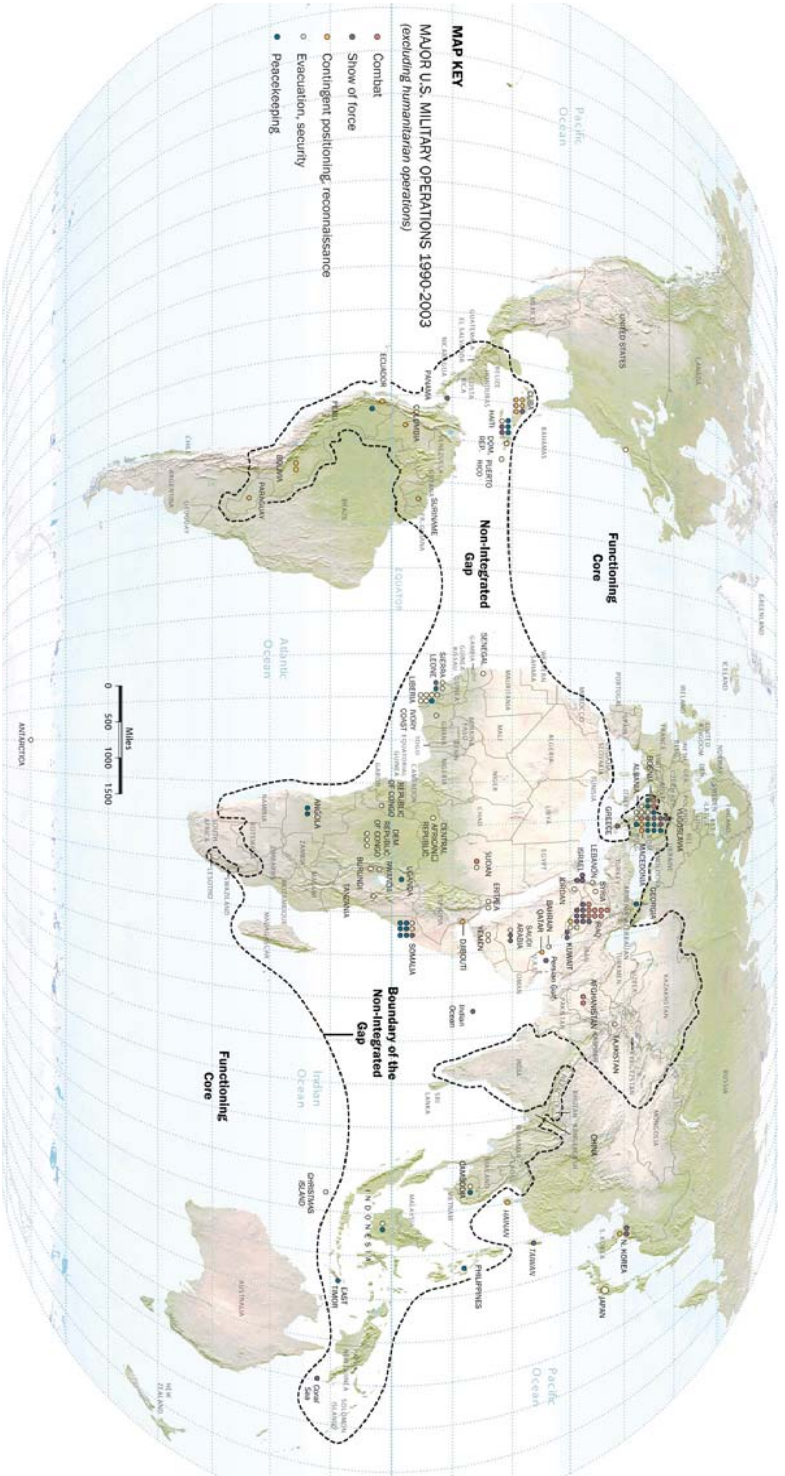


Figure 1: Overview of major US military operations 1990–2003 from Thomas Barnett’s book *The Pentagon’s New Map*. Barnett’s non-integrated gap corresponds roughly to the arc of instability.

You may also have a population that is traumatized by an event or a change in conditions triggered by climate change. If the government there is not able to cope with the effects ... then you can be faced with a collapsing state. And these end up as breeding grounds for instability, for insurgencies, for warlords. You start to see real extremism. These places act like Petri dishes for extremism and for terrorist networks.<sup>123</sup>

Fourth, a substantial portion of the world's energy resources is found in arc regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia and Western Africa. Also located in the arc are the major geopolitical choke points for the transportation of these raw materials, including pipelines across Central Asia and Africa as well as maritime routes in the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea and Suez Canal, and the Malacca Straits in Southeast Asia. According to the 2006 NSS, "the key to ensuring our energy security is *diversity* in the regions from which energy resources come and in the types of energy resources on which we rely."<sup>124</sup> Economic strength in no small part translates into strategic influence and military power, and the raw materials needed to fuel both military machinery and economic growth are therefore strategic goods. In regions lacking liberal institutions – and in which energy resources are nationalized – political and military influence may be the tools necessary to secure export agreements, and competition for limited resources may arise.

A clear sign of Washington's focus on the arc is in the reorientation of US military posture toward these regions. The 2002 NSS recognized that "to contend with uncertainty and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces."<sup>125</sup> Principal Deputy Under-Secretary of Defense for Policy Ryan Henry reported that a main finding of the Global Defense Posture Review completed in 2004 was "developing the operational flexibility and diversity in options needed to contend with uncertainty in the 'arc of instability.'"<sup>126</sup> The State Department has followed suit, reprogramming hundreds of diplomats from, as Secretary Rice described, "the front lines of

123 CNA Corporation, *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change* (Alexandria: CNA Corporation, 2007) (CNA [online 18 Nov 2008]), p. 31. See also Michael Mayer, *Forecasting Risk*.

124 NSS 2006, p. 28.

125 NSS 2002, p. 29.

the last century, in the capitals of Europe and here in Washington, and into the critical posts of this century – in Asia, in Africa, in the Middle East, and here in the Americas.”<sup>127</sup>

## Summary of overarching themes in US grand strategy

The United States, with its overwhelming military and economic superiority, has followed a proactive grand strategy of global primacy, defined by Dueck as “acting aggressively to maintain America’s political and military predominance in the world, while pre-empting any conceivable challenges to a US-led international order.”<sup>128</sup> The US has pursued a dual approach of preparing the groundwork for and hedging against potential great power rivals such as China and Russia, while also addressing immediate threats such as terrorism, proliferation, drugs and weapons trafficking, and general instability emanating from regions containing weak and failed states.

This strategic outlook has led the US to adopt policies that seek to integrate military and diplomatic efforts in a comprehensive and coordinated manner to address challenges that are seen to depend on both types of engagement. In addition, this threat perception justifies US involvement in the internal affairs of other states perceived as allowing or sheltering threats against the US. The United States during the Bush administration has shifted its geopolitical focus. The arc of instability represents those regions from which threats to US security will arise as well as the regions in which strategic resources are found, regions in which American ideology is most notably absent and the regions within which the US will increasingly compete with other great powers for influence. This arc of instability represents the new strategic focus of the US, a fact illustrated by US military and diplomatic realignments to those regions. Notably, the region situated at the very apex of this arc is none other than Central Asia.

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126 Ryan Henry, “Transforming the US Global Defense Posture,” in *Reposturing the Force: US Overseas Presence in the Twenty-First Century* (Newport: Naval War College Press, 2006) (Naval War College [online 18 Nov]), p. 38.

127 Condoleezza Rice, “Resources for Transformational Diplomacy.”

128 Dueck, “Ideas and alternatives,” p. 515.



## **Current US grand strategy: implementation**

If sweeping statements of grand strategic intentions are not translated into actual policies with concrete effects, they remain highly theoretical and can be easily altered or forgotten in future strategic documents by other administrations. The degree to which strategic intentions are implemented provides a measurement of a strategy's longevity and seriousness; most substantial adjustments to US strategic posture and military readiness involve significant financial, structural and bureaucratic investments that are not embarked upon lightly. Military planning that includes likely threats, battlefield environments and requirements of force projection, necessary hardware and armaments, and military force composition are all good indicators of long-term strategic planning. The direction of American diplomacy – in style, substance and geographic focus – is also a good indicator of grand strategic priorities. The United States follows a diplomatic course consistent with the strategic picture presented in the previous chapter. Finally, a good rule to follow for any investigation is to “follow the money.” While this aspect of strategy implementation is most susceptible to domestic and political pressures, the fact remains that any strategy's implementation is dependent on the financial resources at its disposal.

The implementation of US grand strategy discussed here highlights mid-level implementation consisting of program planning rather than operational details, and adds detail and nuance to the broad lines of grand strategy offered in the previous chapter. The geopolitical focus of US grand strategy seen in military basing and diplomatic postings is unmistakable, as is the integration of these strategic interests with ideological elements in US diplomatic efforts. This chapter

deals with US policies on a global level and within the arc of instability, thereby including – but not principally focusing on – Central Asia. However, as one of the regions exhibiting highly relevant structural factors (energy resources, potentially unstable authoritarian states, extremism, and Great Power politics) these implemented policies are highly relevant for Central Asia.

## **Grand strategy implementation: military**

### ***Military planning***

The thinking presented in US military planning documents reinforces the main points of US grand strategy as outlined above. These strategy-implementation documents clearly illustrate the increased attention given to non-state threats, stability operations, and the emphasis on retaining strategic access. The 2005 NDS identifies four general types of threats for which military forces are structured: traditional state-based threats, irregular threats by terrorists or insurgencies that employ unconventional methods, catastrophic threats involving the use of weapons of mass effect, and disruptive threats such as cyber warfare or space-based weaponry that are specially designed to “negate current US advantages in key operational domains.”<sup>129</sup> Based on these threats, the US has four strategic objectives: to secure the United States from direct attack, secure strategic access and retain global freedom of action, strengthen alliances and partnerships, and establish favorable security conditions.<sup>130</sup>

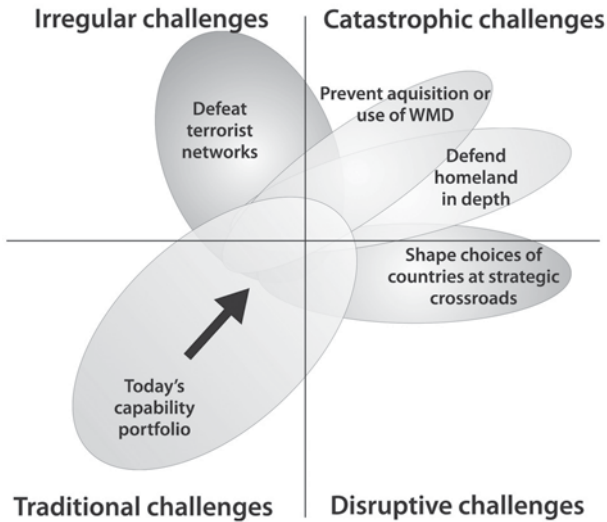
The 2006 QDR authors then evaluated the types of capabilities needed for addressing these threats, and arrived at four groups of capabilities upon which the US force structure is based:

- defeating terrorist networks
- defending the homeland in depth
- shaping the choices of countries at strategic crossroads
- preventing hostile states from acquiring or using WMD.

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<sup>129</sup> NDS 2005, p. 2.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, p. 6–7. The latest Defense Strategy lists its objectives as defending the homeland, winning the Long War, promoting security, deterring conflict and winning our nation’s wars (Robert Gates, “National Defense Strategy,” June 2008, *Defenselink* [online 18 Nov 2008], p. 6).



**Figure 2:** This diagram from the 2006 QDR depicts four groups of threats facing the US (traditional, irregular, catastrophic and disruptive challenges) and four main strategic objectives based on these threats. The document's authors advocate shifting US capabilities to counter these newer challenges while retaining traditional warfighting capabilities.

Due to the perceived strategic uncertainty of the post-Cold War environment, the new Force Planning Construct has moved away from its traditional warfare-oriented and scenario-based formulation towards one that is more generalized and capabilities-oriented.<sup>131</sup> Prior to the 2006 QDR, US forces had been structured so that the military could “defend the US homeland; operate in and from four forward regions; ‘swiftly defeat’ adversaries in two overlapping military campaigns while preserving for the President the option of ‘winning decisively’ one of those campaigns; and conduct a limited number of lesser military and humanitarian contingencies,” the so-called 1-4-2-1 formulation.<sup>132</sup> This transition from scenario-based to capabilities-based planning is a substantial shift, and a shift to a concept that some analysts criticize as dangerously vague.<sup>133</sup>

### **Military forces and hardware**

The 2006 QDR stated very clearly which types of military operations the Pentagon expects to be confronted with in the foreseeable future:

<sup>131</sup> QDR 2006, p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> QDR 2006, p. 36.

In the post-September 11 world, irregular warfare has emerged as the dominant form of warfare confronting the United States, its allies and its partners; accordingly, guidance must account for distributed, long-duration operations, including unconventional warfare, foreign internal defense, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stabilization and reconstruction operations.<sup>134</sup>

Plans for US military capabilities follow these expectations: to continue transforming US forces toward greater flexibility and mobility, extend US technological superiority through continued acquisition of advanced weapons and surveillance systems, and invest in research and development programs to ensure the US retains its superiority and moves toward its goal of full spectrum dominance.

In terms of force structure, the Defense Department has prioritized a modular approach that features self-sufficient military units capable of “long-duration irregular operations.” The US Army, for example, is reorganizing from a division-based structure into smaller brigade-based units, with brigade combat teams (BCT) and support brigades. These brigades will assume many of the roles now performed by Special Operations Forces (SOF) units, which will then be free to undertake more complex and specialized tasks.<sup>135</sup> The “three block war” concept introduced in 1999 by the then commandant of the US Marine Corps, General Charles C. Krulak, described the type of “irregular operations” referred to in the 2006 QDR, in which military personnel would be required to engage in humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping and traditional warfighting within “the span of a few hours and within the space of three contiguous city blocks.”<sup>136</sup>

The application of military force under the guise of the global war on terror has brought about a renewed focus on counterinsurgency operations (COIN). General David Petraeus, one of its best known pro-

133 In a persuasive analysis, Michael Fitzsimmons argues that by moving away from future scenario-based planning and an emphasis on uncertainty, the Bush administration and the Pentagon in fact locked themselves into a more restricted strategic posture: “where analysis is silent or inadequate, the personal beliefs of decision-makers fill the void ... A decision-maker with no faith in prediction is left with little more than a set of worst-case scenarios and his existing beliefs about the world to confront the choices before him.” Michael Fitzsimmons, “The Problem of Uncertainty in Strategic Planning,” *Survival*, vol. 48, no. 4 (winter 2006–07): 134.

134 QDR 2006, p. 36.

135 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

136 Charles C. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999 (Maxwell-Gunter AFB [online 19 November 2007]).



ponents and contributor to the most recent US Army COIN doctrine, signaled the continued importance of such operations in 2008 by promoting a substantial group of likeminded military leaders in his capacity as head of the selection board for rising one star generals.<sup>137</sup> Reviewing the doctrinal evolution of US Army COIN operations, Olof Kronvall concluded that the latest doctrine reveals a deeper understanding of insurgency campaigns, “more fully embraces a political, as opposed to a military, basis for COIN strategy,” sees greater involvement for the US Army, and acknowledges the long-term commitment needed for successful operations of this type.<sup>138</sup> Similarly, the Department of Defense has now institutionalized the growing emphasis on stability operations through Defense Directive 300.05, which declared that stability operations should “be given priority comparable to combat operations and be explicitly addressed and integrated across all DOD activities.”<sup>139</sup> As Jack Kem has noted, “offensive and defensive operations rely on the destructive capabilities of military force; stability operations rely on the constructive capabilities of the military,” whereby emphasis is placed on providing a foundation for conflict prevention.<sup>140</sup> The newly released Field Manual 3-07, “Stability Operations,” marked a “dramatic change in thinking” for the US Army, according to Kem.<sup>141</sup>

The 2006 QDR authors also emphasized stabilization operations and recommended increasing support for the State Department’s Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stability (S/CRS) and a “proposal to establish a deployable Civilian Reserve Corps and a Conflict Response Fund.”<sup>142</sup> Bush echoed this concept in a key speech on the Iraq war on 10 January 2007, when he stated: “We also need to examine ways to mobilize talented American civilians to deploy overseas where they can help build democratic institutions in communities and nations recovering from war and tyranny.”<sup>143</sup> The boundaries between military and civilian roles in US security policy are increasingly blurred, exemplified by reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and the unique

137 Ann Scott Tyson, “Gates Warns of Militarized Policy,” *Washington Post*, 16 July 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008].

138 Olof Kronvall, *Finally Eating Soup with a Knife?* Oslo Files on Defence and Security, no. 5 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2007), p. 43.

139 Quoted in Jack Lem, “Future Face of Conflict: The US Army’s Doctrinal Renaissance,” *World Politics Review*, 14 October 2008 [online 19 Nov].

140 *Ibid.*

141 *Ibid.*

142 QDR 2006, p. 86.

143 George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” 10 January 2007, *White House* [online 3 Apr 2008].

military-civilian structure of the new Africa Command (AFRICOM). Defense Secretary Gates voiced concern about the expanding role of US forces to include roles normally handled by civilians, and argued for increased funding for State Department initiatives.<sup>144</sup>

The growing emphasis on COIN and stabilization operations, which are troop-intensive endeavors that require “boots on the ground”, can be seen in current plans to expand US ground forces. In a major Iraq speech of January 2007, and again in his State of the Union Address several weeks later, President Bush announced plans to increase the size of the Army and Marine Corps by 92,000 troops over a five-year period.<sup>145</sup> The US military has increasingly used artificial means to maintain force levels; US personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan have been subject to “stop-loss” measures – involuntary extensions of enlistment of up to 18 months.<sup>146</sup> The Army has struggled to maintain enlistments, meeting its 2006 recruiting goals only after lowering its standards, allowing larger numbers of recruits who scored poorly on entrance aptitude tests and granting waivers for recruits with criminal records that might previously have disqualified them from service.<sup>147</sup> One possible source for these new troops may be non-US citizens who would serve in the military in exchange for expedited citizenship.

In line with a grand strategy of primacy, the US military has continued to modernize its hardware in a way that emphasizes and incorporates technological advances in mobility, lethality and network warfare capabilities well beyond the nearest peer competitor. The 2004 NMS acknowledged that “while the United States enjoys an overwhelming qualitative advantage today, sustaining and increasing this advantage will require transformation – a transformation achieved by combining technology, intellect, and cultural changes across the joint community,” a “Joint Force” that is fully *integrated, expeditionary, networked* in time and purpose, *decentralized* to allow joint operations at the lower echelons, able to respond quickly with appropriate capabilities, can make better informed decisions more quickly, and highly *lethal*.<sup>148</sup> The focus is on command, control, communications,

144 Robert Gates, speech to the US Global Leadership Campaign.

145 Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation”; George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address,” 23 January 2007, *White House* [online 3 Apr 2008].

146 Tom Regan, “Stop Loss Used to Retain Up to 50,000 Troops,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 31 January 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008]; Tom Vanden Brook, “Extended war tours likely to continue,” *USA Today*, 27 October 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008].

147 CBS News, “Army Meets Goals With Signing Bonuses,” 9 September 2006; CBS News, “Army Lowers Standards to Meet Goals,” 9 October 2006.

computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR), and the ability to obtain and use information from a broad array of sources to maintain tactical and operational superiority both on the battlefield and during peacetime.

For US ground forces (the Army and Marine Corps), new capabilities are being developed that feature advanced networking technology.<sup>149</sup> Air capabilities for the US military include plans to increase airlift capacity for force projection, the continued production of a fifth generation fighter aircraft (F-22A) and the development of a long-range strike capability. Plans for the maritime forces (the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) include increasing the number of aircraft carriers, a new destroyer class, new capabilities to project power in coastal areas and river environments, new attack submarines, and an increase in the use of Afloat Forward Staging Bases (AFSB), or sea basing.<sup>150</sup> The US will also “include a wider range of non-kinetic and conventional strike capabilities, while maintaining a robust nuclear deterrent, which remains the keystone of US national power.”<sup>151</sup> In addition, the Pentagon plans to invest heavily not only in unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for battlefield ISR, but also in a space-based system of satellites. The increased attention paid to unmanned drones with both ISR and strike capabilities may allow the US to conduct military operations in high-risk environments that might otherwise be impractical due to concerns over potential US casualties.<sup>152</sup> In sum, the Pentagon’s procurements highlight the dual strategic goals of combating non-state actors and emerging powers by securing capabilities for both types of threats.

Some analysts have concluded that the Pentagon has yet to prioritize asymmetrical warfare and counterinsurgency operations in its budgetary planning. Michael Klare, in his analysis of the 2006 QDR, observes that

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148 NMS 2004, p. 15. “Jointness is also emphasized in the most recent National Defense Strategy from 2008.

149 The primary developmental program is the Future Combat System (FCS) which is hosting a website named after the program.

150 QDR 2006, pp. 42–61. Using surface ships as bases for ground forces has the advantages of increased flexibility and mobility, without the headaches that accompany permanent infrastructure, diplomatic arrangements, and security needs required for housing troops in a foreign country.

151 QDR 2006, p. 49.

152 This type of capability has been used in Pakistan and Somalia. See Robin Wright and Joby Warrick, “US Steps up Unilateral Strikes in Pakistan,” *Washington Post*, 27 March 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008]; Stephanie McCrummen, “US missile strike in Somalia targets terror suspects,” *Washington Post*, 3 March 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008].

ostensibly, the growing threat of international terrorism is responsible for the Bush Administration's proposed 2007 military budget ... but only a small share of the increase would cover specialized anti-terror and counter-insurgency systems. The biggest and costliest items ... are intended for use against an entirely different enemy: The People's Republic of China.<sup>153</sup>

Andrew Krepinevich reached a similar conclusion in an analysis of the 2006 QDR<sup>154</sup> The military procurement process represents one area of strategic planning that is heavily influenced by domestic political and bureaucratic processes, which may act to complicate the implementation of strategic policy.

### **Global military posture**

The overseas-basing structure of the US is a good indicator of Washington's strategic thinking as it reflects both the threats judged to be most significant as well as the military means by which the US will combat them. Practical limitations on force projection – airlift capabilities, access to facilities, etc. – demand some physical proximity to the dangers and some means of rapidly constituting a military response. The US basing structure must therefore reflect both future threats and their expected location, which carries with it an inherent geopolitical element. The process of establishing a base overseas, including negotiations with the host country, the construction of facilities, the positioning of troops and equipment, and the necessary congressional approval for project funding, is not a decision taken haphazardly. The economic, political, and military/strategic investments involved in the US overseas basing structure are substantial and reveal long-term US strategic thinking.

"We are living in a revolution, and hardly anyone has noticed," wrote Charles Krauthammer in July 2003 about the repositioning of US bases around the globe.<sup>155</sup> As Douglas Feith, then Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, stated in 2003: "everything is going to move everywhere ... There is not going to be a place in the world where it's going to be the same as it used to be."<sup>156</sup> A strategic adjustment from

153 Michael Klare, "Not Terrorism – China Drives up US military spending," *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 7 April 2006 [online 19 Nov].

154 Andrew Krepinevich, "The Quadrennial Defense Review," *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, 14 March 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 9.

155 Charles Krauthammer, "The Sleepy Superpower Awakes," *Time Magazine*, 27 July 2003 [online 19 Nov 2008].

the Cold War posture to one focused on the arc of instability is underway, though at the creeping bureaucratic pace of the Defense Department. According to Ryan Henry, Principal Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, the new global defense posture represents three areas of realignment:

[1] adjusting our presence in Europe by shifting away from legacy Cold War structures ... [2] reforming [US] posture in the Pacific, with increased emphasis on key capabilities to assure allies ... dissuade potential competitors, deter aggressors, and defeat adversaries if called upon to do so ... [and 3] developing the operational flexibility and diversity in options needed to contend with uncertainty in the “arc of instability.”<sup>157</sup>

Not only will the location of US basing undergo a geographic shift, so too will the basic structure of basing for the US military. Robert Critchlow of the Congressional Research Service outlined the new basing concept:

The Defense Department plan envisions three tiers of bases. It would retain some of the large “main operating bases,” such as Ramstein AFB in Germany, which have all of the comforts of the U.S. — family housing, schools, supermarkets, convenience stores, theaters, and populations in the tens of thousands. Further, the military would establish an overseas network of “forward operating sites,” which are more austere installations, lacking the conveniences and hosting smaller numbers of personnel. Military personnel would deploy to these bases for temporary duty (typically one year or less, unaccompanied by families), in contrast to the permanent change of station moves in which an entire family moves to a new base for two or more years. Lastly, minimalist “cooperative security locations,” would likely be run by host nation personnel and would not host U.S. forces on a day-to-day basis. These locations would be used in the event of a crisis to give U.S. forces access to the region. They would also allow U.S. forces to train with local allies and participate in cooperative activities, such as disaster relief or peace-keeping, which can improve military-to-military ties.<sup>158</sup>

156 LA Times, “US To Realign Troops in Asia,” *LA Times*, 29 May 2003.

157 Henry, “Transforming the US Global Defense Posture,” p. 38.

This tiered system of bases reflects the thinking of General James Jones, former commander of the US European Command, who argued for the creation of a collection of “lily pads” for US forces, “small, lightly staffed facilities for use as jumping-off points in a crisis.”<sup>159</sup> The forward operating sites (FOS) and cooperative security locations (CSL) would constitute the majority of US basing infrastructure within the arc. This would minimize the US “footprint” in sensitive regions while maintaining a forward posture that maximizes speed, flexibility, and the “ability to project power from one region to another and to manage forces on a global basis.”<sup>160</sup>

On a practical level, the global redeployment of US forces entails closing almost 200 facilities in Western Europe and shifting to smaller installations in Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, which “offer ports and airfields on the Black Sea, closer to potential instability in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East.”<sup>161</sup> Interestingly, the 2005 Overseas Basing Commission review committee argued that:

Africa, for example, has become of increasing strategic importance to the United States ... for years to come our ability to project power (and, therefore, influence) is dependent on our presence in Europe. The same realities exist for Eastern Europe, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and other regions east and south of Central Europe.<sup>162</sup>

An increased US military focus on Africa was officially expressed in President Bush’s 2008 budget proposal through the creation of an Africa Command (AFRICOM), carved out of the expansive European Command Area of Responsibility (EUCOM). An existing US base in this new region, located in the Horn of Africa nation of Djibouti, was established in 2002 and houses around 1,500 soldiers, while new forward operating locations have been created elsewhere on the continent, mainly in Western and Southern Africa (for example Senegal, Mali,

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158 Robert Crichlow, “US Military Overseas Basing: New Developments and Oversight Issues for Congress: CRS Report for Congress” (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2005), *Federation of American Scientists* [online 21 Apr 2007], p. 2.

159 Kurt M. Campbell and Celeste Johnson Ward, “New Battle Stations?” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2003.

160 Henry, “Transforming the US Global Defense Posture,” p. 39–40. This echoes the “Base Force” concept of the early 1990s, where US dominance would be assured through a preponderance of force in smaller bases spread across the globe.

161 Campbell and Ward, “New Battle Stations?”

162 Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structures ..., p. 9.

Ghana, Gabon, Uganda, Zambia, and Namibia).<sup>163</sup> The Defense Department reportedly has plans to build a substantial naval base in the Gulf of Guinea region, close to the oil-exporting countries upon which the US will increasingly rely for its energy needs.<sup>164</sup> In Asia, personnel are shifting from South Korea and Japan, replaced in those countries by rapidly deployable forces such as Stryker Brigades. Hawaii and Guam will be important hubs for potential future operations against China, and plans also include bases inside the easternmost edge of the arc of instability, namely Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines.<sup>165</sup> In sum, the US network of overseas bases represents, according to one recent report, “a new type of global expeditionary posture that supports rapid US power-projection operations, and one specifically designed to maximize US global freedom of action.”<sup>166</sup>

## Grand strategy implementation: political

The political and diplomatic policies of the Bush administration offer further evidence of its grand strategic intentions to maintain its position of global primacy. A surprising level of coordination exists between the Pentagon and the State Department in terms of threat perception, geographic focus and shared understanding of the necessary capabilities required. The emphasis on retaining America’s global freedom of action can be seen in the administration’s approach toward institutions and bilateral relationships. Further, the political implementation of US grand strategy clearly demonstrates the integrated nature of ideology within the American perception of strategic interests. The shift in geopolitical focus to more authoritarian arc regions reinforces this integration while presenting some practical challenges for pursuing US interests there. As one might expect, these elements are highly relevant in the context of US policy in Central Asia.

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163 Colin Robinson, “Worldwide reorientation of US military basing in prospect,” *Straus Military Reform Project of the Center for Defense Information (CDI)*, 19 September 2003 [online 19 Nov]; US Department of State, “New Initiatives with African Countries: Foreign Press Center Roundtable,” 8 March 2004 [online 19 Nov]; John Correll, “European Command Looks South and East,” *Air Force Magazine*, vol. 86, no. 12 (December 2003).

164 Robinson, “Worldwide reorientation . . .”

165 Henry, “Transforming the US Global Defense Posture”; Campbell and Ward, “New Battle Stations?”

166 Andrew Krepinevich and Robert O. Work, *A New Global Defense Posture for the Second Transoceanic Era* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2007) (CSBA [online 19 Nov 2008]), p. 197.

### **Transformational diplomacy**

The State Department required serious readjustments even prior to Condoleezza Rice and her plans to reform the agency. A 1999 State Department report warned that the agency was near “a state of crisis” due to poor and outdated infrastructure and misallocation of resources, and that “our overseas presence is perilously close to the point of system failure.”<sup>167</sup> During his tenure as Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005, Colin Powell began addressing these shortcomings by investing in technology and created several thousand new positions within the department. The principle restructuring plan, however, began under Secretary Rice with her introduction of *transformational diplomacy* in January 2006. Rice laid out the objectives of this effort as: “to work with our many partners around the world, to build and sustain democratic, well-governed states that will respond to the needs of their people and conduct themselves responsibly in the international system.”<sup>168</sup>

Specifically, transformational diplomacy consists of at least six categories of readjustments directed at continuing the modernization process within the department as well as increasing its ability to influence the internal characteristics of other states. First, diplomatic personnel have begun a geographic repositioning process whereby hundreds of postings in Europe and Washington DC have been eliminated and new positions created in arc regions such as Africa, South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. Second, the State Department will adopt a more regional focus within larger countries where the US has no diplomatic presence, where regional public diplomacy centers will utilize local collaborations to further US interests and “take America’s story directly to the people.” Third, diplomats will be encouraged to engage more actively foreign publics outside the capital cities, partly by making use of modern internet technology. Fourth, the State Department plans to fine-tune and adjust personnel’s expertise and skills more efficiently through new training methods and greater demands for flexibility on the part of Foreign Service officers. Fifth, the Department envisions increased collaboration between civilian and military structures, exemplified by the Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization (S/CRS).<sup>169</sup>

167 US Department of State, *America’s Overseas Presence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, report of the Overseas Presence Advisory Board, November 1999, *Federation of American Scientists* [online 19 Nov 2008].

168 Condoleezza Rice, “Transformational Diplomacy.”

169 US Department of State, “Transformational Diplomacy,” fact sheet issued by the State Department’s Office of the Spokesman, 18 January 2006 [online 21 Feb 2008].



The final set of readjustments involves consolidating the many foreign assistance programs under one framework, headed by the newly created position of Director of Foreign Assistance (DFA). With direct control over just over half of all US foreign aid, amounting to USD 20 billion, the DFA position is designed to ensure the improved efficiency, coordination and strategic use of funds to achieve US foreign policy objectives. These policy goals are contained within a five point framework that includes peace and security, just and democratic governance, investing in people, economic growth and humanitarian assistance. Additionally, the framework classifies target states into five categories that will shape funding priorities: rebuilding states, developing states, transforming states, sustaining partnership states and restrictive states.<sup>170</sup> Taken together, the reforms enacted under the guise of transformational diplomacy highlight the strategic thinking espoused by Secretary Rice that places an increased emphasis on shaping developments, trends and circumstances within countries, as opposed to a more traditional interstate conceptualization of diplomacy. The true effects of these organizational adjustments remains dependent on funding that has yet to reach the levels deemed necessary to fully implement existing plans.

### ***Less reliance on permanent institutions***

One political policy shift associated with the Bush administration has been from having an institutionalized diplomatic framework as the initial and primary foundation for military action, as Presidents George H.W. Bush and Clinton generally had, to one that actively asserts its prerogative to act independently of institutions such as NATO and the United Nations. Admittedly, both former presidents committed military forces to operations lacking a mandate from the UN Security Council (Panama for Bush and Kosovo for Clinton), but the George W. Bush administration has appeared particularly willing to commit forces in lieu of finding diplomatic solutions. Stephen Walt wrote that

Americans should worry when generally pro-American publications like the *Economist* describe the United States as “too easily excited; too easily distracted, too fond of throwing its weight around,” or when knowledgeable but moderate foreign

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<sup>170</sup> Nakamura, Kennon H. and Susan B. Epstein, *Diplomacy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Transformational Diplomacy* CRS report for Congress, 23 August 2007, *Federation for American Scientists* [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 7–8.

observers describe the United States as a “rogue superpower” or “trigger-happy sheriff.”<sup>171</sup>

A 2004 Council on Foreign Relations task force found that “public diplomacy is all too often relegated to the margins of the policy process, making it effectively impotent.”<sup>172</sup> Adjustments in Bush’s second term have in part addressed this type of criticism, as low-level diplomatic interaction with Iran and the resumption of talks with North Korea illustrate.

The US increasingly prioritizes bilateral relationships and coalitions created for specific missions, reflecting current strategic needs. NATO’s invocation of Article 5 after the terrorist attacks on 9/11, and the US decision not to involve the alliance in the initial phase of Operation Enduring Freedom after the offer of assistance was extended, reinforced the perception of Washington’s interest in acting outside the hindrances of a multilateral framework. A similar pattern exists in the ongoing missile shield debate; the US chose to pursue its missile defense plans on a bilateral basis with Poland and the Czech Republic rather than coordinate its initial plans through a NATO framework.

On the other hand, the US arguably has always seen NATO as an instrument for pursuing its strategic interests. Richard Betts observed that “the USA used alliance integration for its own purposes, and its sovereignty was never substantially compromised by the integration,” leading to a situation whereby “the United States would coordinate with its allies as long as it was confident that Washington could control the essential resulting action.”<sup>173</sup> Betts later addressed NATO expansion, noting that “For Washington, whose domination of NATO’s command structure has never been in doubt, expansion of the alliance was an extension of American power into Eastern Europe.”<sup>174</sup> As the Overseas Basing Commission review committee argued in its 2005 report:

US presence in Europe remains crucial to future global security. The legitimacy of that presence lies directly with our ties to NATO. Full participation in NATO allows us to maintain a

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171 Stephen Walt, “A New Grand Strategy for American Foreign Policy,” *National Interest*, February/March 2005 (Boston Review [online 19 Nov 2008]).

172 Quoted in Walt, “A New Grand Strategy ....”

173 Richard K. Betts, “National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks,” *Princeton Project on National Security*, November 2004 (Princeton University [online 19 Nov 2008]), p. 26–7.

174 Betts, “National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks,” p. 29.

leadership position in European affairs, as well as contiguous regions ... Moreover, the ability to influence international events from our base in NATO expands well beyond Europe proper.<sup>175</sup>

One set of “allies and partners” that has increasingly seen improving and closer relations are the Asian countries of India, Japan and Australia. While the latter two countries have been solid US allies for decades, a noticeably intensified strategic relationship has evolved over the past few years. As the 2006 QDR stated,

in the Pacific, alliances with Japan, Australia, Korea and others promote bilateral and multi-lateral engagement in the region and cooperative actions to address common security threats. India is also emerging as a great power and a key strategic partner.<sup>176</sup>

Improving relations with India may signal Washington’s desire to encourage India’s development into a major regional power and thereby serve as a regional anchor against growing Chinese influence. This diplomatic alliance-building effort, combined with the continued acquisition of military systems designed for conventional warfare, constitute the US strategy of “hedging” against a rising China. At the same time, the US has also attempted to engage bilaterally as well as integrate China into international regimes.<sup>177</sup>

### ***Exporting security and democracy to the arc***

As outlined in the preceding chapters, the United States regularly incorporates ideological elements in both its strategic planning and its rhetoric. Well-illustrated by the reforms associated with transformational diplomacy, the geographic focus of US diplomacy has shifted. Washington has formed new bilateral relationships with countries inside and adjacent to the arc since the end of the Cold War, especially since the War on Terror began. Operating in regions such as Central Asia and Africa presents both opportunities and challenges for US policymakers. Countries located in the arc are characterized mainly by au-

175 Commission on Review of Overseas Military Facility Structures ..., p. 9.

176 2006 QDR, p. 88.

177 See for example Daniel W. Drezner, “The New New World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2007); David Shambaugh and Karl F. Inderfurth, “China and the US: To Hedge or Engage,” *YaleGlobal Online*, 11 April 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

thoritarian rule, weak state structures, extreme poverty, and a lack of internal democratic institutions. In one sense, this offers increased freedom of action for the United States in that active opposition to government support for US counterterrorism activities will most likely be minimal.

This new geographic focus has caused legal and diplomatic adjustments tailored to these new circumstances. In addition, the US has since 2002 signed so-called Article 98 agreements with at least 100 countries – the majority of them within the arc – whereby they pledge not to surrender American citizens to the International Criminal Court.<sup>178</sup> The Bush administration discontinued US participation in the ICC in 2001, believing it could be used for the political persecution of US officials and citizens. The Clinton administration held a similarly skeptical position despite signing the Rome Statute, and sought similar assurances for US citizens within the ICC framework. The Pentagon is also pressing for increased legal maneuvering room at home for relationships with countries in the arc that may not meet current US legal standards in terms of human rights and democratic institutions. The 2006 QDR recommends that “Congress provide considerably greater flexibility in the US Government’s ability to partner directly with nations in fighting terrorists,” which may include “training, equipping and advising their security force” or “logistics support, equipment, training and transport to allow them to participate as members of coalitions with the United States or its allies.”<sup>179</sup>

Legislation pertaining to foreign assistance, military aid, and International Military Education and Training (IMET) contains provisions restricting their use in countries with poor human rights records, restrictions on the free exercise of religion, or other normative concerns. One example, the “Global Train and Equip” program, is a joint effort of the State and Defense departments to support military counterterrorism efforts in countries such as Chad, Indonesia, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Yemen. Similarly, Secretaries Gates and Rice pressed Congress in 2008 for increased latitude in funding police, paramilitary forces and indigenous clandestine operations.<sup>180</sup> The US foresees the

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178 US Department of State, “US Signs 100th Article 98 Agreement”, press statement by Richard Boucher [online 8 Dec 2008].

179 QDR 2006, p. 89.

180 Ann Scott Tyson, “More Leeway Sought on Foreign Aid Spending,” *Washington Post*, 16 April 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008].

bulk of its security challenges – China being the one substantial exception – as emanating from the arc, and US actions will require partners in a region where democratic institutions and respect for human rights are a rarity. This exemplifies just one of many difficult choices facing US policymakers in conducting the war on terror or providing security to the arc: prioritizing security interests or human rights concerns.<sup>181</sup>

## Grand strategy implementation: economic

The economic and financial health and growth of the United States represent another of these competing interests. The Clinton administration greatly emphasized the economic component of its grand strategy. In fact, observers such as Colin Dueck saw this as President Clinton's main focus:

The Clinton administration stressed the heightened importance of globalization, foreign economic policy, and economic “competitiveness” in the new international order. One might even say that the Clinton team believed that “geoeconomics” had replaced “geopolitics” as the driving force behind international relations.<sup>182</sup>

The spread of liberal economic institutions and structures abroad would benefit the United States by allowing access to new markets, and the anticipated evolution from liberal economic institutions to liberal political institutions would spread democracy and therefore also increase US security.

Although the Bush administration has not embraced globalization with the same fervor of the Clinton years, the basic proposition outlined above still resonates among policymakers. The 2006 NSS proclaims economic liberty “is ultimately inseparable from political liberty” and praises the benefits of the market economy as “the greatest antidote to poverty.”<sup>183</sup> The strategy views economic freedom as reinforcing political freedom by “creating diversified centers of power and authority that limit the reach of government. It expands the free flow of ideas.”<sup>184</sup> The Bush administration highlights its role in the Doha

181 For more on this, see Michael Mayer, *Security or Human Rights: US Foreign Policy Dilemma in Uzbekistan*, Forsvarsstudier, no. 2 (Oslo: Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2006).

182 Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders*, p. 130.

183 NSS 2006, p. 27.

round of negotiations of the World Trade Organization, the successful passage of the Central American Free Trade Agreement, as well as the negotiation of a number of regional and bilateral free trade agreements.

The Millennium Challenge Account constitutes just one small example of US policy linking economic and political development, with a focus on good governance. In a speech announcing the countries selected for the program (with 14 of the 16 countries located in the arc), President Bush outlined the effort as one that

encourages all nations to embrace political and economic reform. The United States has pledged to increase its core development assistance by half, adding USD 5 billion annually by 2006. To be eligible for this new money, nations must root out corruption, respect human rights, and adhere to the rule of law.<sup>185</sup>

Similar thinking links US humanitarian and development assistance with its strategic goals. By investing in AIDS relief programs and encouraging economic development, the United States serves to promote political stability and individual freedom in vulnerable regions. Diplomatic efforts by Washington to encourage economic development are underway in nearly every region of the world; such initiatives demonstrate close ties between ideological, humanitarian, economic and strategic interests in US policy.

### ***Energy resources and strategic interests***

In regions where abundant energy resources are located, this connection between market access and US strategic interests is abundantly clear. The United States today imports approximately 60 percent of its petroleum needs, a figure that is projected to rise considerably in the coming years as consumption steadily increases.<sup>186</sup> As noted earlier, the majority of the oil and gas reserves are found inside the arc: the Middle East, the Caspian Sea region, northern South America, and Western Africa. African petroleum now accounts for 15 percent of US oil imports and this is projected to rise to 20 percent by 2010.<sup>187</sup>

184 Ibid, p. 28.

185 George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President at Ceremony Celebrating Countries Selected for the Millennium Challenge Account," 10 May 2004, *White House* [online 1 Apr 2008].

186 Energy Information Agency, "How dependent are we on foreign oil?" 22 August 2008 [online 21 Nov 2008].

Washington increasingly sees the development of new and diversified sources of energy outside the Middle East as a strategic interest. This, coupled with the desire to expand market access and liberalize national institutions, drives US policy both in Africa's Gulf of Guinea and among several of the Caspian Sea littoral states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). The situation is further complicated by poor governmental structures in many of the countries possessing energy reserves, and state ownership of these reserves that could prevent normal market forces from ensuring access.

Economic and strategic interests also converge in these regions with regard to China. Securing access to energy resources is vital to the US economy as well as its military. As one report predicted, future energy needs in both the developed world and in developing economies such as China and India will eventually outstrip available supplies. As a result,

Competition for energy supplies will dominate the economic landscape during the next 30 years ... the prospect, apparent or real, of the peak production of oil during the timeframe out to 2035 and progressive diminution of output thereafter will intensify competition for remaining resources.<sup>188</sup>

China has now begun a global campaign to secure access to these dwindling resources to fuel its growing economy, entering into bilateral agreements with countries in regions such as South America, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Today, China imports roughly 30 percent of its oil needs from Africa and is seeking out new agreements.<sup>189</sup> The United States is actively engaged in energy-rich regions around the globe. Having proclaimed its national security interest in the free flow of energy from the Persian Gulf, the US also seeks to safeguard energy exports from western Africa and Central Asia.

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187 Council on Foreign Relations, *More than Humanitarianism* (Washington DC: CFR, 2005) [online 21 Nov 2008], p. 30.

188 UK Ministry of Defence, Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Centre: "The DCDC Global Strategic Trends Programme 2007–2036 Third Edition," December 2006, *DCDC Strategic Trends* [online 18 Nov 2008], p. 31.

189 Energy Information Administration: "Country Analysis Brief: China," August 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

### **Strategic aspects of US domestic economic and budgetary policy**

In addition to strategic decisions made concerning US actions overseas, domestic decisions are made that also directly affect US national security. Apart from the economic aspects of US energy dependence, the United States has become increasingly vulnerable due to its economic and monetary policies. The US federal budget has undergone a dramatic shift since 2001, when a USD 127 billion surplus in 2001 became a USD 158 billion deficit in 2002. As Stephen Biddle wrote, “Barring major changes in American fiscal policy, large, sustained expenditures for ongoing preemptive warfare can be expected to create corresponding increases in federal budget deficits” due to the fact that “these wars are being funded by spending without corresponding taxation.”<sup>190</sup> Biddle argued, along with the *Wall Street Journal*, that the US economy could accommodate these increased costs, as the percentage of gross domestic product devoted to defense spending (less than 5 percent of GDP) is low by historic standards.<sup>191</sup>

Constant and sizable deficits, however, can hamper economic growth and foreign investors fund these budgetary shortfalls. The overseas funding of US debt exacerbates the continuing balance of payments deficit (imports exceeding exports). As Biddle observes, “This represents an ongoing net shift of wealth overseas. In the short run, this enables Americans to enjoy a higher standard of living than our own production can sustain. But in the long run, it transfers capital, and thus productive resources, from America to other great powers.”<sup>192</sup> Foreign ownership of the US national debt has increased from 17 percent in 1988 to over 27 percent in 2006, with Japan holding the largest share of the foreign-owned debt (20 percent), followed by China (10 percent).<sup>193</sup> Such budgetary decisions are not made in a vacuum and have real-world consequences that can act to limit future policy options.

Defense spending has risen markedly since President Bush took office. While some point out the defense budget’s relatively low ratio to the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP), approximately four per-

190 Biddle, *American Grand Strategy after 9/11*, p. 17.

191 *Wall Street Journal*, “Our Small Defense Budget,” 20 October 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

192 Biddle, *American Grand Strategy After 9/11*, p. 18.

193 Kimberly Amadeo, *The U.S. National Debt and How It Got So Big*, About.com:US Economy [online 19 Nov 2008]. These types of arguments are only strengthened by the financial crisis affecting the United States and the rest of the world as this study goes to press.



cent, a comparison between the United States and other countries reveals a clear budgetary priority to retain military superiority. The US accounted for a large portion of global defense spending in 2006, its USD 528 billion comprising 46 percent of the USD 1.1 trillion world defense spending total. The US outspends second highest defense spender China, at USD 59 billion, by nearly a factor of ten.<sup>194</sup> For Stephen Biddle, a US grand strategy based on great power competition – and containment – entails one set of capabilities and costs, while a war on terror, involving the “rolling back” of international terrorism (as Biddle sees the US as attempting to do) entails another set of capabilities and costs. These two strategies, Biddle argued, are tactically, diplomatically, and economically incompatible.<sup>195</sup>

The wholehearted pursuit of a “rollback” GWOT strategy as pursued by the Bush administration undermines efforts to prolong a balance of power defined by unipolarity and US primacy. At the very least, the US is financially unable to sustain the costs associated with the current administration’s policy of combining the two strategies, and the increasing costs of the war in Iraq has forced the US into a position where it must choose.<sup>196</sup> Nathan Freier reached a similar conclusion, writing that the combination of rising economic costs for US strategy and declining domestic and international support for US policies is a result of failing to adopt “a real *ends*-focused, *ways* and *means*-rationalized, and *risk*-informed grand design,” and therefore “the United States is vulnerable to slow surrender to strategic exhaustion and voluntary retreat from that essential activism necessary to the security of its position in perpetuity.”<sup>197</sup>

## Reviewing US grand strategy: constant themes of geopolitics and ideology

There is considerable convergence – among the strategic documents, administration rhetoric, and the implementation of US military, political, and economic policy – around a grand strategy of global primacy based on addressing two distinct categories of threats. First, the US currently views the challenge from non-state actors – mainly Islamic

194 Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, “Recent trends in military expenditures: The 15 major spenders in 2006,” *SIPRI* [online 19 Nov 2008].

195 Biddle, *American Grand Strategy after 9/11*, p. 28.

196 Ibid.

197 Nathan Freier, “Primacy Without a Plan”: 18 [original italics].

extremists but also drug traffickers and international crime syndicates – and “rogue states” as the overriding strategic threat facing the nation. A range of responses have been implemented that concentrate on asymmetric warfare, preventative policies that address regional instability, and means of shaping state behaviors through direct interventions and engagement. Secondly, the US actively hedges against rising or resurgent regional powers such as China and Russia by continuing to develop traditional military capabilities for use in conventional interstate conflicts. US grand strategy therefore aggressively pursues twenty-first century non-traditional threats while at the same time maintaining a traditional state-centric approach.

The United States throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first has consistently involved geopolitical reasoning and planning in its grand strategy. During the Cold War period, the policy of containment closely followed the classic geopolitical theoreticians such as Mackinder and Sypkman. Geographic imagery combined with political realities to lead policymakers crafting US grand strategy to pay particular attention to geographic positioning and strategic regions such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Northeast and Southeast Asia. During the containment era, lines were drawn on the globe dividing the world into two camps – east versus west. The post-Cold War era rendered this conceptualization less helpful and the 1990s saw US policymakers drifting towards a new strategic concept, one of global primacy. With an increased focus on non-state actors, regional instability and an emphasis on the political “character” of states, the arc of instability again draws lines upon the globe to delineate the areas of US vital interest. With a fundamental shift in US overseas basing, the US reveals its strategic focus on the unstable, yet resource-rich, areas of the globe, while remaining vigilant to traditional interstate challenges from China or Russia.

Another consistent feature of US grand strategy has been the inclusion of ideological elements. US exceptionalism and the urge to spread American values and governmental institutions overseas have a strong influence over US policymakers and the American public. Even though this component may appear instrumental or rhetorical, the impact of liberal values and ideas on US grand strategy is real. Ideology in US policy serves to shape policies in a way that strengthens the resolve of US policymakers and offers a strong rationale for US domestic support of Washington’s foreign policy. The Cold War conflict con-

tained a strong ideological component in using the spread of democracy to prevent the spread of Soviet-style communism. Democratic ideals continue to play an instrumental role in US grand strategy. As the current evaluation of global threats to US interests includes regime character, the inclusion of ideology serves both a rhetorical and functional purpose in US strategic thinking.

A final feature of twentieth-century US grand strategy has been an unwavering interest in the Eurasian continent. Since Mackinder's heartland theory at the turn of the century, perhaps even before, Eurasia has been the focus of US strategy, and developments there have been closely linked to US national security by policymakers in Washington. During the Cold War, the US strove to contain the heartland power of the Soviet Union, both on the Rimland as well as in other regions where Soviet-style ideology seemed to take root. Today, the arc of instability encompasses a large portion of the Rimland and represents the global commons where competition for resources and political influence will be located. The increasing focus on containing the anticipated emergence of China as a peer competitor, along with the possible re-emergence of a Russian threat, keeps the US firmly focused on Eurasia.

Unlike the geopolitics of Mackinder's age, however, twenty-first century geopolitical interaction will take place on a global basis. Mackinder and Mahan saw the potential of the Eurasian heartland as a generator for the resources necessary for world dominance, a region naturally sheltered from the maritime powers of the day. Today's strategic realities are such that the resources necessary for global influence and domination are located not only on the Eurasian heartland, but in the broad expanses of the arc as well. The modern global economy, interconnected and crossing national boundaries, requires different strategies for national economic strength than those of the early twentieth century. With the advent of technological advances in communications, satellites, cyberspace, and power projection, a twenty-first century containment strategy will be waged not only in those regions in geographic proximity to the opponent, but also in the global commons where the sources of economic wealth and political influence are found.

These reoccurring themes in US grand strategy come together in Central Asia. As the 2006 NSS document stated,

Central Asia is an enduring priority for our foreign policy ... In the region as a whole, the elements of our larger strategy meet, and we must pursue those elements simultaneously: promoting effective democracies and the expansion of free-market reforms, diversifying global sources of energy, and enhancing security and winning the War on Terror.<sup>198</sup>

It is in Central Asia that the main characteristics of the arc of instability – those of Islamic extremism, weak governments, economic disconnectedness, and abundant energy resources – combine with increasing Chinese, Russian, and Iranian involvement and influence. Central Asia, then, represents one of the principle arenas where all the elements of US grand strategy will be tested in the coming years.

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198 NSS 2006, p. 40.

# Central Asia regional background

Historically known as “the land between the two rivers,” Central Asia’s kingdoms – from Alexander the Great in 300 AD until as recently as the fifteenth century – were protected from the Persians in the south by the Amu Darya, while the Syr Darya slowed the periodic attacks by nomadic invaders from the north.<sup>199</sup> High mountain ranges – the Pamirs, the Himalayas and the Hindu Kush – border the region to the east and south, while the Caspian Sea lies to the west.<sup>200</sup> As a political and analytical entity, Central Asia today normally comprises five countries: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Some scholars such as Olivier Roy suggest the inclusion of Azerbaijan in this grouping, especially since recent events have shown that country’s economic importance to the region.<sup>201</sup> Others scholars argue that Afghanistan represents an integral part of the region’s culture and politics and should be defined as a Central Asian state, a position recently taken by the US State Department as well.<sup>202</sup> While the arguments for a broader definition of Central Asia are compelling, the five Central Asian states share a history and set of issues that both bind them together and separate them from their neighbors.

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199 Unless otherwise noted, the background information provided here relies on Mayer, *Security or Human Rights*.

200 Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

201 Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: the Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

202 S. Frederick Starr, “A Partnership for Central Asia,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 4 (July/August 2005): 164–178; Svante E. Cornell and Niklas LP Swanstrom, “The Eurasian Drug Trade: A Challenge to Regional Security,” *Problems of Post-Communism* vol. 53, no. 4 (July/August 2006) (Institute for Security and Development Policy [online 19 Nov 2008]):10–28. Cornell and Swanstrom also include the Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Province of western China that borders on Central Asia to the east.

The steppes of Central Asia have long been a crossroads for traders and a tempting objective for repeated conquests, many of which have left their mark on the present day dynamics of the region in the form of social and political organization, language, religion, and culture.<sup>203</sup> A network of trading routes known as the Silk Road traversed the region from the time of Alexander the Great around 300 BC until the opening of new sea routes rendered the Silk Road obsolete in the fifteenth century. The legacy of both Turkish and Persian conquests of Central Asia is today visible in the linguistic and common cultural heritage of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran; the rest of Central Asia retains Turkic cultural and linguistic roots. In more modern times, Tsarist Russia, tempted by the mineral and cotton resources of Central Asia, expanded into the region in mid nineteenth century. The Russian advance towards southern Central Asia occurred during a time when the British Empire was expanding northward from India into Afghanistan. Geopolitical maneuvering between these two powers for control and influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan was intense during this period, a time referred to by many as “The Great Game.” Russia and Britain agreed to separate spheres of influence, separated by the Durand Line that eventually formed the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## Legacy of Soviet rule

Soviet planners decided in 1924 that the best way to counter the growing sense of pan-Turkic unity and rash of rebellions throughout Russian Turkestan was to divide the region into smaller entities. The borders drawn up between 1924 and 1936 encouraged the establishment of national identities in the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) rather than a pan-Turkic one, while leaving sizeable ethnic minority populations in each republic to avoid cohesive republics that might challenge Soviet rule. These SSRs were never intended as independent states and they shared a common infrastructure of power lines, pipelines and transportation networks.<sup>204</sup> The Soviet Union also set about dismantling traditional Islamic culture in Central Asia, ultimately driving it underground. When the USSR col-

203 This paragraph based on Lena Jonson, *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia* (London; IB Tauris, 2006), pp. 17–36; Rashid, *Jihad*, pp. 19–25.

204 Megoran, Nick, “The critical geopolitics of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary dispute, 1999–2000” *Political Geography*, vol. 23 (2004): 731–764.

lapsed in 1991, the five newly independent states of Central Asia retained roughly these Soviet boundaries and inherited a host of other issues from Moscow's rule.

The present day national borders are perhaps the most visible sign of this set of problems inherited from the Soviet Union. The shared infrastructure, rather than encouraging closer cooperation, has often fostered adversarial relationships that hinder the economic growth of individual states and the region as a whole. In 1998, Uzbekistan implemented measures to secure and demarcate its borders. The regime restricted border crossings in a manner that adversely affected cross-border trading, initiated the construction of a two-meter high barbed-wire fence along portions of its Fergana Valley borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and proceeded to lay unmarked landmines along other stretches.<sup>205</sup> While many of the land borders within Central Asia have been satisfactorily demarcated over the past decade, territorial rights in the Caspian Sea continue to be a point of contention due to the valuable energy resources underneath the seabed.<sup>206</sup> Water rights represent a closely related source of conflict. The high mountainous terrain of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan provide Central Asia's two main sources of water: the Amu Darya and Syr Darya Rivers. The low-lying agricultural areas of Uzbekistan depend on water from these rivers for irrigation. The two upstream countries use the rivers to generate hydroelectric power, but have meager oil and gas resources and therefore depend on gas imports, mainly from Uzbekistan.

As the Soviet Union fell apart and each of the Central Asian Soviet Socialist Republics gained its independence, the Communist Party leadership in each republic was well-positioned to retain power during the transitional period to statehood. The five Central Asian regimes have exhibited varying levels of authoritarianism since independence. Irregular voting practices, a lack of real opposition parties, and limited freedom of the press are widespread throughout Central Asia. Heavy-handed tactics are employed to quell unrest, suppress or eliminate opposition movements and leaders, and ensure the regime's continued hold on power. Throughout the region, instances of politically moti-

205 Ibid: 734.

206 Jim Nichol, *Central Asia's Security: Issues and Implications for US Interests* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), *Federation for American Scientists* [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 10. See also Kamyar Mehdiyoun, "Ownership of Gas and Oil Rights in the Caspian Sea," *American Journal of International Law*, vol. 94, no. 1 (2000): 179–189.

vated arrests, torture, and imprisonment are well known and documented. Corruption is rampant throughout the region – bribery and nepotism are a way of life. The authoritarian and closed nature of Central Asian regimes can create future instability due to potential succession conflicts, although regime changes in both Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan occurred reasonably smoothly. In addition, the lack of political or legal recourse for opposition groups allows popular unrest to be radicalized and can also contribute to regional instability.

## **Radical Islam, terrorism and narcotics**

The Soviet authorities took active measures to suppress Islam within the Central Asian SSRs by closing mosques, banning religious ceremonies, and forbidding the reading of the Koran and the wearing of veils by Muslim women. Moscow changed tactics in the 1960s by establishing a government-sanctioned version of Islam, as part of an effort to broaden the appeal of the Soviet system to Muslim countries abroad by holding up Central Asia as a model. This move resulted in a dual system of an “official” state-sponsored Islam while an underground “unofficial” Islam continued to exist. The closed nature of the Soviet system, especially with regard to Islam, effectively froze the development of religious thought in the region. When the Central Asian republics became independent states in 1991, the dramatic increase in mosques throughout the region was simply an outward sign of the profound Islamic revival taking place. Muslim missionaries from other countries, including Iran, Pakistan, and fundamentalist Wahhabis from Saudi Arabia, streamed into the region to promote their particular brand of Islam and contributed to the radicalization of the religion in Central Asia. Authorities initially banned Islam in the political arena, but eventually adopted increasingly repressive policies toward the general practice of Islam among the populace.<sup>207</sup>

Concern over the northward expansion of Taliban forces during the mid-1990s, coupled with Islamic militants fighting a civil war in neighboring Tajikistan, contributed to a sense of imminent threat from radical Islam. The resulting peace agreement in Tajikistan, which established a power-sharing coalition between secular and Islamic groups, had an equally profound effect on Central Asian leaders concerned with retaining power. In February 1999, six car bombs ex-

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207 Rashid, *Jihad*.



ploded in the Uzbek capital of Tashkent, as part of a possible assassination attempt on President Karimov, killing 13 and wounding 120 others. Uzbek authorities blamed an organized insurgent group called the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Another radical Islamic group, Hizb ut-Tahrir, had also become active in Central Asia, advocating the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia purportedly through non-violent means and communicating principally by spreading leaflets.

In 1999, IMU members conducted a cross-border raid into the Kyrgyz portion of the Fergana Valley from their base in the Tajik mountains. The following year, several hundred IMU militants again conducted raids and engaged both Kyrgyz and Uzbek forces, with fighting lasting for several months.<sup>208</sup> After the October 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, the IMU reportedly left to fight alongside the Taliban and Osama bin Laden and was severely weakened by coalition forces.<sup>209</sup> Signaling the group's continued existence in 2004, IMU suicide bombings at the US and Israeli embassies in Tashkent killed three and wounded a dozen more.<sup>210</sup> Remaining elements of the group are reportedly based in Pakistan's tribal area of South Waziristan and engaged in sporadic skirmishes with local Pashtun tribesmen. Tajik and Uzbek officials have also warned of an increasing threat posed by terrorist and extremist groups, though some observers interpret these statements as political posturing to justify repressive domestic policies and to elicit renewed international counterterrorism support.<sup>211</sup> Chinese Islamic separatist Uighur groups, responsible for violence in China's Xinjiang province as well as in Kyrgyzstan, have reportedly also been training with the IMU in Afghanistan.<sup>212</sup>

In addition, the IMU is reportedly heavily involved in drug trafficking to finance its operations – the 1999/2000 incursions into the Fergana Valley may have had more to do with opening up new smuggling routes than with military insurrection.<sup>213</sup> According to a 2007 United Nations report, Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the world's illegal opium and

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208 Ibid.

209 Nichol, *Central Asia's Security*, p. 8.

210 Ibid, p. 7.

211 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "Central Asia: Is Islamic Movement Of Uzbekistan Really Back?," *RFE/RL* 2 February 2006; Farangis Najibullah, "South/Central Asia: Is Talk Of IMU Aimed At Courting Outsiders?" *RFE/RL*, 2 July 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008]; Farangis Najibullah, "Tajikistan: Are Concerns About 'Islamic Extremism' Justified?" *RFE/RL*, 26 April 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

212 Rollie Lal, *Central Asia and its Asian Neighbors: Security and Commerce at the Crossroads* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2006), pp. 4–7.

much of it is smuggled through Central Asia on its way to Russian and European markets.<sup>214</sup> The Taliban has reportedly forged a strategic alliance with opium growers in Afghanistan, collecting taxes in exchange for protection from government eradication programs.<sup>215</sup>

The combination of Islamic militants in Central Asia, organized crime, opium growers in Afghanistan, the Taliban insurgency, the interests of neighboring Pakistan, and continued US/NATO efforts to provide security and reconstruction assistance to the Karzai government contributes to some extremely complex and significant political dynamics in the region. Apart from the obvious social issues relating to narcotics, including addiction and the spread of HIV through dirty needles, there are political and security issues as well. Corruption is rampant among Central Asian border officials, who are well-paid to allow heroin shipments to pass through checkpoints. Organized crime represents a threat to vulnerable political institutions in Central Asia through corruption, the “privatization” of these institutions for criminal purposes, and even some evidence of organized crime’s involvement in Kyrgyzstan’s 2005 political uprising.<sup>216</sup>

## Energy issues

One primary reason for continued great power interest in Central Asia is the presence of hydrocarbon reserves in the region. The bulk of Central Asia’s oil and natural gas reserves are located in the Caspian Sea littoral states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, with Uzbekistan also controlling some reserves. Kazakhstan’s proven oil reserves at the end of 2006 amounted to nearly 40 billion barrels, while reserves in both Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were estimated at 600 million barrels each. In terms of natural gas, Kazakhstan holds three trillion cubic meters of gas, Turkmenistan 2.86 trillion, and Uzbekistan 1.87 trillion. In October 2008, an independent auditing firm provided the first ex-

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213 Justin Miller, “The Narco-Insurgent Nexus in Central Asia and Afghanistan,” *National Interest*, 7 May 2003 [online 19 Nov 2008]; Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanstrom, “The Eurasian Drug Trade ...”: 10–28; Martha Brill Olcott, “Russia, Central Asia and Caucasus Threats; A Four Year Assessment,” testimony prepared for the House Committee on Armed Services Threat Panel Hearing on Threat in Eurasia, 22 September 2005, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* [online 19 Nov 2008].

214 Imogen Foulkes, “Afghan opium production ‘soars,’” *BBC News*, 25 June 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

215 Jon Lee Anderson, “The Taliban’s Opium War,” *New Yorker*, 9 July 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

216 Miller, “The Narco-Insurgent Nexus ...”; Cornell and Swanstrom, “The Eurasian Drug Trade ...”

ternal analysis of Turkmenistan's natural gas reserves and reported substantial finds that greatly exceed current estimates. If the latest numbers are accurate, Turkmenistan's reserves may be between five to ten times the amounts listed here.<sup>217</sup> Using the older figures, the Central Asian states are estimated to control approximately 3.3 percent of total global oil reserves (comparable to Libya) and 4.3 percent of the world's natural gas (comparable to total North American reserves).<sup>218</sup>

### Central Asia Oil and Gas

		<b>Reserves</b> Billion barrels (oil) Trillion cubic meters (gas)	<b>Production</b> 100,000/day (oil) bcm/year (gas)	<b>Consumption</b> 100,000/day (oil) bcm/year (gas)
Kazakhstan	Oil	39.80	1490	219
	<b>Gas</b>	<b>1.90</b>	<b>27.3</b>	<b>19.8</b>
Turkmenistan	Oil	0.60	198	107
	<b>Gas</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>67.4</b>	<b>21.9</b>
Uzbekistan	Oil	0.60	114	119
	<b>Gas</b>	<b>1.74</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>45.6</b>

*Table 1: Summary table of hydrocarbon reserves, production and consumption in Central Asia. The figures for Turkmenistan do not include the results of the 2008 audit of gas reserves. (BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2008.)*

As the table above shows, Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas account for the majority of hydrocarbon exports in Central Asia. According to an International Crisis Group report, Kazakhstan is one of the few non-OPEC producers “not expected to reach peak conventional crude oil production for at least another two decades. It is possible that it has the greatest conventional oil production growth potential of any non-

217 Bruce Pannier, “Independent Audit Shows Turkmen Gas field ‘World Class,’” *RFE/RL*, 14 October 2008.

218 These figures are from the BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2008, available online at their website. By comparison, the Middle East region controls 61.5% (oil) and 40.5% (gas) of global reserves. Russia accounts for 6.6% (oil) and 26.3% (gas) and Norway holds 0.7% (oil) and 1.6% (gas) of total reserves.

OPEC country.”<sup>219</sup> An important trend illustrated by the table is the ratio of energy production to domestic consumption. While Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas have lower domestic consumption rates and can therefore be exported in greater quantities, Uzbekistan’s high domestic use of oil and gas relative to production – the country is actually a net importer of oil – currently limits exports.<sup>220</sup>

These three countries face political and economic challenges due to the combination of authoritarian regimes and substantial economic windfalls generated by state-owned energy resources. As the ICG report warns, oil and gas riches can contribute to instability and conflict in the region in several ways. Interstate conflicts may arise over ownership of reserves, though this has not yet occurred. Regimes may devote oil and gas incomes to security forces and corruption at the expense of solving domestic problems such as diversifying their economies or educating their citizens. Finally, the report observes that countries with oil and gas production tend to experience “poverty, repression, environmental degradation and labor tensions without seeing benefits from the wealth that is created.”<sup>221</sup> As mentioned earlier, corruption is widespread throughout Central Asia. According to UK-based *Global Witness*, the bulk of Turkmenistan’s gas revenues were in offshore accounts under President Niyazov’s personal control, in amounts believed to be in excess of USD 3 billion. It appears that none of the substantial income from gas sales is used in the national budget, while living standards have fallen since Soviet rule.<sup>222</sup>

The landlocked geographical position of Central Asia forces the region’s energy exporters to rely on neighboring countries to transport their products to markets. Existing Soviet-era pipeline infrastructure transported energy north to the rest of the Soviet Union, and the majority of Central Asian energy exports continue to transit Russian territory. Since its independence, the region has witnessed intense competition for pipeline projects that combine economic interests and geopolitical considerations. Pipelines have been constructed that transport oil and gas south into Iran, west from the Caspian port city of Baku in Azerbaijan, and east from Kazakhstan into China. A host of

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219 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Central Asia’s Energy Risks*, ICG Asia Report no. 133, 24 May 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 8.

220 BP, “Statistical Review of World Energy,” June 2008 [online 21 Nov 2008].

221 ICG, *Central Asia’s Energy Risks*, p. 1.

222 In 2005, Turkmenistan scored 97<sup>th</sup> of 177 countries on the United Nation’s Human Development Indicators, see Global Witness, *Its a Gas: Funny Business in the Turkmen-Ukraine Gas Trade*, April 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

planned projects are under consideration and depend largely on political agreement between transit nations. With steadily increasing demand in China and Europe for Central Asian gas, Russia's traditional stranglehold on exports from the region is under pressure.

## Russia in Central Asia

Central Asian gas exports are vital to Russia's energy policy. Nearly all of Central Asia's natural gas is bought by the Russia's state-owned energy company Gazprom. The region's main producer, Turkmenistan, will sell 85 percent of its gas exports to Russia by 2008, with the remainder going south to Iran.<sup>223</sup> Russia has used this near-monopoly on Central Asian exports to pressure the region's producers into selling their gas at extremely low prices (one-fourth to one-third of market value), and then reselling it to Europe for a handsome profit. This practice has allowed Russia to delay the substantial infrastructure investments needed to increase production by its own gas fields, which hold one quarter of the world's total reserves; however, these reserves are more expensive to extract and will most likely require advanced Western technology.<sup>224</sup>

Similarly, Kazakhstan routed 80 percent of its oil through Russian pipelines in 2006 and President Nazarbayev announced in May 2007 that "Oil and gas cooperation [with Russia] is strategically important, specifically in transporting Kazakh oil to global markets ... Kazakhstan is completely committed to transporting most its oil, if not all of it, across Russian territory."<sup>225</sup> According to the March 2007 congressional testimony of analyst Kimberly Marten, Russia endeavors to establish a pipeline monopoly over Kazakh oil, which is of higher quality than Siberian crude and therefore more profitable. Russian ownership of the pipelines has allowed it to insist on mixing the two oils together into an "Urals blend," which increases Russian profits.<sup>226</sup> Even more fundamentally, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported

223 Zorawar Dault Singh, "The Great Game moves south," *Asia Times Online*, 18 May 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

224 Stephen Blank, "Russia's Energy Sector Hides Weaknesses Behind Powerful Facade," *Eurasianet Commentary*, 16 May 2006 [online 1 Jun 2007]; see also Amy Myers Jaffe, "Russia: Back to the Future?" Testimony before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 29 June 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

225 *RIA Novosti*, "Putin, Nazarbayev focus on energy, transport, space," 10 May 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

226 *RFE/RL*, "Russia Seeking Control of Kazakhstan's Oil, Expert Says," 27 Marcy 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

that a 2004 Russian gas industry study had found that without Central Asian gas exports, Russia would be unable to meet existing export commitments to Europe and China.<sup>227</sup> As analyst Stephen Blank writes,

It is easy to see how the loss of control over Central Asian energy exports and production would severely damage Russia's political and economic interests ... the availability of other export options would force Moscow to pay considerably higher prices for Central Asian oil and gas – a development that could have ruinous consequences for the Russian economy.<sup>228</sup>

Russia has consistently demonstrated its concern over the spread of Islamic extremism in Central Asia. The steadily increasing influence of Islamist groups in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 turned Tajikistan into Russia's first line of defense against the spread of radical Islam into Central Asia and southern Russia. Russian troops patrolled the Afghan-Tajik border even after Tajik independence, and Russia supported the secular interim government against an Islamic-democratic coalition during the Tajik civil war while at the same time organizing an anti-Taliban coalition inside Afghanistan.<sup>229</sup> The IMU incursions of 1999–2000 spurred Moscow to renew regional security cooperation among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) members under the Collective Security Treaty (CST), ultimately resulting in a CST rapid deployment force (CRDF) in May 2001.<sup>230</sup> Similarly, Russian concerns over the flow of narcotics trafficking and organized crime from Central Asia into Russia have led to cooperative efforts to address these threats.

Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs note that Moscow had created a “common threat perception in the CIS space ... Russia has in the period after 11 September more readily blurred the lines between internal and external

227 Roman Kupchinsky, “Russia: Gas Export Plan Dependent on Central Asia,” *RFE/RL*, 28 March 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

228 Blank, “Russia's Energy Sector.”

229 Jonson, *Tajikistan*, pp. 95–97. The Rahmon regime's perception of Russia as its ultimate security guarantor was aptly illustrated in 2005. When unrest in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan led to the ousting of President Akayev, President Rahmon immediately called President Putin for reassurance, which he received.

230 Kathleen A. Collins and William C. Wohlforth, “Defying ‘Great Game’ Expectations,” *Strategic Asia 2003–2004 Fragility and Crisis*, National Bureau of Asian Research [online 21 Nov 2008], pp. 291–318. The actual threat currently posed by radical Islam in the region is more difficult to gauge as both Central Asian leaders as well as Moscow have an interest in exaggerating the threat for political purposes.

threats,” although “already from 2000 and onwards, Moscow seemed to distinguish poorly between internal threats to Russian security (Chechnya) and external threats involving the CIS territory.”<sup>231</sup> While Russia initially accepted the sudden increase in US military and diplomatic activities in Central Asia after 11 September 2001, as Moscow shared Washington’s objectives of eliminating the Taliban and other Islamic extremists groups like the IMU, the US military presence soon led to what Roy Allison has called a Russian “strategic reassertion” in the region.<sup>232</sup> In the spring of 2003, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov proposed what came to be known informally as the Ivanov Doctrine, namely that Moscow reserved the right to conduct preemptive strikes in the CIS against all manner of threats, be they military, economic, or cultural (i.e. to protect ethnic Russians in the post-Soviet space).<sup>233</sup> The Georgian conflict of August 2008 merely served as an illustration of such thinking.<sup>234</sup>

In a broader sense, the perception of Central Asia as firmly within Russia’s distinct sphere of influence resonated strongly with some elements of its foreign policy elite who have voiced support for reestablishing Russian dominance over the post-Soviet space since the USSR’s dissolution, among them Vladimir Zhirinovskii, Gennadii Ziuganov, and Aleksandr Dugin. They represent a movement in Russian political thinking some have labeled Eurasianism, a geopolitical theory similar to Mackinder’s heartland concept that argues for Russian control over the Eurasian heartland and the ultimate expulsion of Western influence in the region.<sup>235</sup> Reflecting this trend, President Vladimir Putin in April 2005 referred to the collapse of the USSR as one of the greatest geopolitical catastrophes of the twentieth century, and has prioritized the restoration of Russian influence in Central Asia.<sup>236</sup>

231 Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke, “Copy That ...”: A Russian “Bush Doctrine” in the CIS? (Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, 2005), p. 27.

232 Roy Allison, “Strategic Reassertion in Russia’s Central Asia policy,” *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no.2 (2004): 277–293; see also Ingerid M. Opdahl, *A Crucial Sphere for Our Security: Russia in Central Asia after 9/11*, Forsvarsstudier, no. 3 (Oslo, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, 2005).

233 See Wilhelmsen and Flikke, “Copy That ...,” p. 18; Allison, “Strategic Reassertion ...”: 280.

234 For more on this point, see Roy Allison, “Russia resurgent? Moscow’s campaign to ‘coerce Georgia to peace,’” *International Affairs*, vol. 84, no. 6 (2008): 1145–1171.

235 Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland”; Ilan Berman, “The New Battleground: Central Asia and the Caucasus,” *Washington Quarterly* (winter 2004–05) [online 19 Nov 2008]: 59–69; see also Dmitry Shlapentokh, “Russia’s Foreign Policy and Eurasianism,” *Eurasianet Commentary*, 9 February 2005 [online 19 Nov 2008].

236 Clover, “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland.”

This combination of economic, security, and political interests in Russia's "Near Abroad" has translated into an active policy to retain, as Mikhail Troitskiy puts it, "the ability to influence decision-making in the states of the region in key spheres bearing directly on Russia's security and economic development."<sup>237</sup> This is accomplished through bilateral agreements, security cooperation through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and CSTO (through which Russia supplies Central Asian government with military equipment at reduced prices), and maintaining Russian military bases in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Moscow's approach requires regime stability, and Russia has therefore been suspicious of democratization efforts that could lead to any political unpredictability and threaten Russia's growing influence in the region.

## China in Central Asia

In many respects, Chinese interests in Central Asia parallel those of Russia: energy, Islamic extremism, and limiting the influence of other actors in the region. In contrast to Moscow's military and political engagement with Central Asia, however, Beijing's activities in the region have largely been focused on improving trade ties and securing new sources of energy. China's security cooperation with the Central Asian nations has been mostly conducted through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

China became a net importer of oil in 1993 and the country's continued economic growth has only increased domestic demand. Domestic oil production in 2005 amounted to 3.8 million barrels per day to make it the sixth largest oil producer in the world, with the majority of its production capacity located in northeastern China. However, the most productive fields there have peaked and are now in decline, resulting in a surge of exploration and development of other domestic reserves.<sup>238</sup> New fields are being developed in the northeastern portion of the country as well as in the western provinces such as Xinjiang, in addition to offshore sites in the South China Sea.<sup>239</sup>

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237 Mikhail Troitskiy, *Institutionalizing US-Russian Cooperation in Central Eurasia*, Keenan Institute Occasional Paper, no. 293 (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006) [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 3.

238 Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Briefs: China."

239 Ibid. Xinjiang province in particular may hold up to 44 billion barrels of oil, an amount greater than Kazakhstan's total proven reserves.



At the same time, China has increasingly looked outside its borders for additional energy resources to meet growing domestic demand. As Peter Hatami and Andrew Wedeman note, China's controversial search for new oil reserves began in the 1970s and 1980s with its claims of drilling rights in the South China Sea.<sup>240</sup> In the 1990s, however, China shifted its tactics for securing imports through commercial means and now holds investments and export agreements in 50 countries throughout Africa, the Middle East, South America, and Central Asia.<sup>241</sup> In 2005, PetroChina, the country's largest oil producer, completed the USD 4.18 billion purchase of Canadian-based PetroKazakhstan, the second largest producer of oil in Kazakhstan, beating out challenges from India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation as well as Russia's Lukoil.<sup>242</sup> The Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) agreed in 2006 to invest USD 210 million in oil and gas exploration in Uzbekistan over a five year period. In April 2007, Turkmenistan's president Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov and Chinese President Hu Jintao agreed to a production-sharing arrangement to develop gas fields in eastern Turkmenistan. In addition, the two leaders reaffirmed Turkmenistan's 2006 commitment to sell 30 billion cubic meters of gas to China annually for 30 years, beginning in 2009.<sup>243</sup> China's activities in Central Asia's oil and gas sector challenge the Russian-dominated status quo and place Beijing in direct competition with Moscow for access to the region's limited energy resources.

In addition to its energy interests in Central Asia, China has expanded economic ties in other sectors as well. Inexpensive manufactured goods from China have flooded Central Asian markets. China has invested in various infrastructure projects throughout the region: a highway in Tajikistan, a hydroelectric plant in Kazakhstan, an irrigation project in Uzbekistan.<sup>244</sup> As Mikhail Troitskiy observes, "Beijing's 'quiet' policy in Central Asia is focused on the economic penetration of the region by means of small trade and on ensuring that China gets a 'fair' stake in Central Asian energy projects."<sup>245</sup> The influx

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240 Peter Hatami and Andrew Wedeman, "Oil and Conflict in Sino-American Relations," *China Security*, vol. 3, no. 3 (summer 2007) [online 19 Nov 2008]: 95–118.

241 Ibid.

242 *BBC News*, "CNPC secures PetroKazakhstan bid," 26 October 2005 [online 19 Nov 2008]; Mikhail Troitskiy, *Institutionalizing US-Russian Cooperation*, p. 4.

243 Vladimir Socor, "Turkmenistan-China Gas Agreements: Still a Very Long Shot," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 20 July 2007 [online 19 Nov 2008].

244 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "China: Beijing Makes Further Economic Inroads into Central Asia," *RFE/RL*, 21 June 2006 [online 19 Nov 2008].

245 Mikhail Troitskiy, *Institutionalizing US-Russian Cooperation*, p. 4.

of cheap manufactured goods that hinders the creation of an indigenous industrial base, and an increase in Chinese nationals working on Chinese oil company projects, have raised concern among the populations of the Central Asian countries.<sup>246</sup>

The Chinese province of Xinjiang, which borders on Central Asia, is strategically important to Beijing for a number of reasons. Pipelines carrying energy imports from Central Asia must transit the mountainous province to reach Chinese markets. Xinjiang also holds important substantial and presently untapped oil reserves of its own. In addition, it is home to a nuclear testing ground and a number of China's nuclear ballistic missiles.<sup>247</sup> Several analysts argue that for Beijing to focus its attention on Taiwan, it must first secure its flank: the north-western border.<sup>248</sup> China therefore strives to limit US engagement in Central Asia, as well as contain the low-level insurgency threat posed by Turkic Uighur separatist groups operating in Xinjiang.

## The Shanghai Cooperation Organization

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, border delineation issues were faced not only by the newly formed Central Asian republics, but by their neighbors as well. Longstanding border disputes between China and the Soviet Union in the region suddenly became easier for Beijing to resolve successfully. In 1996, China initiated a group known as the "Shanghai Five," comprised of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, which signed the *Shanghai Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area*. An agreement on the limitation and transparency of military forces in the region followed in 1997, building upon this new security regime.<sup>249</sup>

The success of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, combined with Chinese and Kyrgyz concerns over Uighur separatist groups, encouraged the Shanghai Five to begin consultations on a collective counter-terrorism effort. The increasing threat from the IMU led Uzbekistan to seek inclusion in the organization, which then became known as the

246 Gulnoza Saidazimova, "China: Beijing Makes Further Economic Inroads"; Rollie Lal, *Central Asia and its Asian Neighbors*, p. 9.

247 Ibid, p. 6.

248 James Brian McNabb, "The Unanticipated Utility of US Security Structures: Avoiding Cold War II in Central Asia," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 25 (2006): 307–327; Boris Rumer, "The Powers in Central Asia," *Survival*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2002): 57–66.

249 Alyson Bailes et al., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, SIPRI Policy Paper, no. 17 (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, May 2007) [online 19 Nov 2008], p. 4.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The foundational document of the new group addressed the three threats perceived to be most pressing for SCO members: terrorism, separatism, and extremism.<sup>250</sup> The SCO in 2001 announced its intention to form a counter-terrorism center in Central Asia. The US invasion of Afghanistan in response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks severely weakened both the Taliban and the IMU, largely eliminating the threat for which the SCO had been formed. Member states have been reluctant to invest any real diplomatic energy or resources in joint security efforts of this type.<sup>251</sup> The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) was, after much discussion amongst SCO members, finally established in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2004.

For both Russia and China, membership in the SCO provides a tool for combating common threats such as extremism and drug trafficking as well as offering both regional powers increased influence in the Central Asian states. Both countries have a complex set of political interests that are well-served by SCO membership, though Russia and China generally pursue their core national interests in Central Asia through other means: Moscow uses the CSTO for security matters and bilateral agreements for energy, while Beijing relies mostly on bilateral agreements for energy and trade. The Central Asian republics, for their part, are able to use the SCO's institutional framework to balance Russia and China and prevent either one from dominating the region. At the 2008 SCO summit in Dushanbe, member countries agreed that while they support Russia's "active role" in the Georgian conflict, they did not recognize the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>252</sup> The resistance to Russian requests for full support illustrates the complex nature of the organization and its balancing mechanisms. In the end, Central Asian participation in the organization may ultimately hinge, as a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) found, on authoritarian regime security:

... A striking and unusual feature of the SCO is that ... its members all have more or less autocratic forms of government. This not only provides the obvious explanation of why shared measures against "extremism" and "secessionism" and the rejection of foreign "interference" have featured so highly on the

250 James Brian McNabb, "The Unanticipated Utility of US Security Structures": 318; Collins and Wohlforth, "Defying 'Great Game' Expectations," p. 305.

251 Ibid.

252 *RFE/RL*, "SCO Fails to Back Russia Over Georgia," 28 August 2008.

group's agenda, but also allows SCO proceedings to take place in an exclusively state-to-state mode, with minimal transparency and no significant means of democratic control. In this perspective it is not unfair to categorize the SCO as a pact for regime survival: a pro-status quo, as well as anti-terrorist, coalition.<sup>253</sup>

## **Afghanistan: the soft underbelly?**

At the 2008 SCO summit, Uzbek President Islam Karimov argued that the most important concern for Central Asia was stabilizing Afghanistan, as instability there affected the entire region.<sup>254</sup> The ongoing conflict against the Taliban along with the continuous flow of narcotics from Afghanistan into Central Asia does indeed have a significant impact on security throughout the region. As mentioned earlier, a potent mix of Islamist fighters from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China have been reported in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Just as the specter of radical Islam affected the security dynamics of Central Asia during the 1990s, the resilience of the Taliban resistance in Afghanistan creates uncertainty and unease among the region's leaders. There is also profound interest throughout Central Asia for new trade routes, and the region's economic opportunities would be enhanced immeasurably by a stable and secure Afghanistan.

Finding solutions to the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan is complicated by an intricate web of regional concerns and the historical geopolitical interests of its neighbors. Iran, with its cultural and linguistic ties to Tajikistan, also has an interest in regional security via stability in Afghanistan. In addition, Iran sees economic opportunities in both Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Having a stake in Caspian Sea energy deposits as well as providing a possible export outlet for Central Asian energy, Iran has increasingly been active in the region. India, for its part, also has historic links to Tajikistan. India supported the Northern Alliance and Tajik tribes in their fight against the Pakistani-supported Taliban during the 1980s, and the relationship has expanded to include military cooperation with Tajikistan and an Indian military facility in Farkhor. The base would guard against a possible Taliban resurgence in the region, as well as allow quick air access to the contested region of Kashmir.<sup>255</sup>

253 Alyson Bailes, et al., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, p. 9.

254 RFE/RL, "SCO Fails to Back Russia Over Georgia."

As Robert Kaplan outlined in a recent article, the Afghan conflict cannot be properly understood without accounting for the Indian-Pakistani conflict:

The war in Afghanistan is part of Pakistan's larger struggle with India. Afghanistan has been a prize that Pakistan and India have fought over directly and indirectly for decades. To Pakistan, Afghanistan represents a strategic rear base that would (along with the Islamic nations of ex-Soviet Central Asia) offer a united front against Hindu-dominated India and block its rival's access to energy-rich regions. Conversely, for India, a friendly Afghanistan would pressure Pakistan on its western border—just as India itself pressures Pakistan on its eastern border—thus dealing Pakistan a strategic defeat.<sup>256</sup>

Many experts are concerned over Pakistan's internal stability after a leadership and legitimacy crisis ultimately forced President Pervez Musharraf to step down as violence from Islamist radicals intensified. With the ungoverned FATA used by insurgents as a base for attacks both within Pakistan and Afghanistan, a weakened Pakistani government currently seems unable (or unwilling) to address the threat.

## **Summary: Central Asia background**

Central Asia is a region rife with pressing issues on many fronts: security, economic, political, and environmental. At the same time, a number of powerful external actors have compelling interests in the region and pursue them through both bilateral and institutional means. While the tired "Great Game" analogy may indeed be overused, the political situation in the region remains highly charged and is viewed by many through a prism of geopolitical and geo-strategic considerations. The fundamental issues at stake in Central Asia are those of energy, extremism, autocratic leaderships, and economic growth. Despite China's growing economic presence in the region, the dominant role still belongs to Russia. It views the region as vital to its energy and security policy, as well as in a fundamentally nationalistic sense as Russia's "Near Abroad." Other actors have shown increasing interest

255 See Lal, *Central Asia and its Asian Neighbors*, p. 31.

256 Robert D. Kaplan, "Behind the Indian Embassy Bombing," *Atlantic*, 1 August 2008 [online 19 Nov 2008].

in Central Asia in recent years, including the United States. As the myriad of interested parties interact with one another, and with the countries of the region, a fascinating strategic game has emerged.

# US policy in Central Asia

## Early US policy in the region (1991–2005)

When the Central Asian republics became independent states in 1991, policymakers in Washington saw both dangers and opportunities.<sup>257</sup> Structural and institutional weaknesses among these new states left them vulnerable to the types of transnational threats that would become increasingly worrisome in the post-Cold War era. A sizeable portion of the USSR's nuclear arsenal positioned in Kazakhstan, for example, suddenly made that nation a temporary leading nuclear power. Poor economic conditions, weak security arrangements, low salary levels and porous borders made the proliferation of these weapons an immediate concern. Other Central Asian nations, such as Uzbekistan, had biological or chemical weapons laboratories susceptible to similar concerns. The sudden introduction of a large regional security vacuum in Central Asia prompted a series of initiatives from the George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations.

The Freedom Support Act, approved by Congress in 1992, authorized funding for a wide range of programs for Russia and the other newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. One of them, the Cooperative Threat Reduction program, consisted of non-proliferation initiatives aimed at securing loose Soviet weaponry, strengthening border controls and initiating the decommissioning of weapons sites. The region-wide approach was also seen in other efforts: solidifying the sovereignty of the new states, generating regional economic development, encouraging democratic reforms and improved human rights practices, and granting broad humanitarian assistance packages. In addition, the US took an interest in the energy resources present in the Caspian Sea region, and became a strong supporter of developing new

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<sup>257</sup> This summary of US policy in Central Asia prior to 2005 is based on Mayer, *Security or Human Rights*.

oil and gas export routes. These programs were conducted with sensitivity to the Russian government to reassure Moscow that US intentions were benign, a consideration evident in President Bush's policies and one that continued through the first years of the Clinton administration.

By the mid 1990s, foreign policy and regional experts began to question the value of a region-based policy dependent on preserving US-Russian relations. Frederick Starr's 1996 *Foreign Affairs* article, "Making Eurasia Stable," was representative of this new thinking.<sup>258</sup> Starr argued that Central Asia faced three possible futures: a return to Moscow's sphere of influence, increased instability and chaos, or a strategic equilibrium attained through the emergence of one or several anchor states. As the largest and most influential regional player, Starr considered Uzbekistan best suited to act as an anchor state and encouraged the US to form its policies to strive toward this outcome. Others argued in a similar fashion, including Zbigniew Brzezinski and former Lt. General William Odom of the Hudson Institute.

Undersecretary of State Strobe Talbott's speech in July 1997 outlined the possible consequences of US inaction in the region:

If economic and political reform in the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia does not succeed – if internal and cross-border conflicts simmer and flare – the region could become a breeding ground of terrorism, a hotbed of religious and political extremism, and a battleground for outright war. It would matter profoundly to the United States if that were to happen in an area that sits on as much as 200 billion barrels of oil.<sup>259</sup>

Regarding US–Russian relations, Talbott refuted the widespread interpretation of Central Asia as the backdrop for a renewed Great Power rivalry between the US and Russia, stating that Washington was not interested in zero-sum solutions:

For the last several years, it has been fashionable to proclaim, or at least to predict, a replay of the "Great Game" in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The implication, of course, is that the driving dynamic of the region, fueled and lubricated by oil, will be the

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258 S. Fredrick Starr, "Making Eurasia Stable" *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 75, no. 2 (1997): 80–92.

259 Strobe Talbott, "A Farewell to Flashman," speech at Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, 21 July 1997 (US Department of State [online 19 Nov 2008]).



competition of the great powers to the disadvantage of the people who live there. Our goal is to avoid and to actively discourage that atavistic outcome. In pondering and practicing the geopolitics of oil, let's make sure that we are thinking in terms appropriate to the 21st century and not the 19th. Let's leave Rudyard Kipling and George McDonald Fraser where they belong – on the shelves of historical fiction. The Great Game – which starred Kipling's *Kim* and Fraser's *Flashman* – was very much of the zero-sum variety. What we want to help bring about is just the opposite: We want to see all responsible players in the Caucasus and Central Asia be winners.<sup>260</sup>

The Clinton administration actively supported pipelines that traversed Turkish territory rather than through Russia, and pushed for an export route from Baku in Azerbaijan to Ceyhan in Turkey. Through US Special envoy Richard Morningstar, an agreement was signed in 1999 and the recently completed Baka-Tblisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline became the first major oil export route that avoided Russian territory.

The 1998 bombing of the US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania predicated a shift in US strategy towards the region, as an increased focus on radical Islamic terror group al Qaeda and its leader Osama bin Laden required intensified bilateral security cooperation with Uzbekistan. The secular and authoritarian regimes of Central Asia had been viewing the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan with increasing concern, viewing the fundamentalist movement as potentially inspiring other radical groups in the region to challenge their hold on power. Such groups were becoming increasingly active throughout the region, especially in the volatile Ferghana Valley, where insurgent groups launched incursions into Kyrgyzstan and were thought responsible for bombings in Tashkent. The Uzbek government, already active in its fight against suspected extremist groups, welcomed US cooperation and the increased security assistance that followed. In the final years of the Clinton administration, security concerns began to outweigh diplomatic pressure for political reform.

The terror attacks on 11 September 2001 accelerated this trend. As the US prepared for the invasion of Afghanistan, named Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the cooperation of the Central Asian republics became crucial to the practical implementation of US strategy.

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260 Ibid.

Conducting combat operations in this landlocked region required logistical support, overflight arrangements and basing rights. Uzbekistan became an irreplaceable ally due to its central location in the region and its border crossings that offered good access into the mountains of northern Afghanistan. Just one hour after the intense negotiations with Tashkent had resulted in a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the US commenced its air campaign against the Taliban, soon followed by the establishment of a US military presence at Karshi-Khanabad (K2) in southern Uzbekistan. A second base at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, also served to maintain vital supply lines to OEF and the stabilization operations that followed.

New agreements and intensified relationships were quickly established in Central Asia to arrange logistical support for Operation Enduring Freedom, as well as create a revised framework for pursuing other US security interests in the region. Tajikistan's strategic location along Afghanistan's northern border also made it attractive to military planners, though far from ideal for basing purposes, as there were still lingering tensions from its recently ended civil war, widespread government corruption and ties to narcotics traffickers, and a significant number of Russian troops still garrisoned in the country. Nonetheless, access to Tajik territory was valuable for transporting men and equipment into northern Afghanistan.<sup>261</sup> Similarly, the K2 base in Uzbekistan provided direct border access to Afghanistan as well as an airstrip capable of acting as a logistics hub for the military.

Over the next several years, US-Uzbek relations in particular intensified as the strategic partnership developed and concerns over human rights violations were toned down. When congressional legislation limited the delivery of security assistance in 2004, the Pentagon used departmental funds to ensure continued cooperation. This emphasis on the US-Uzbek bilateral relationship was a cause of concern for other Central Asian countries, wary of Uzbekistan's aspirations towards regional hegemony and its aggressive behavior toward its neighbors concerning everything from gas supplies to border demarcation. Despite US efforts to maintain the bilateral relationship, however, Tashkent began to voice its irritation over the lack of remuneration for the K2 base. The invasion of Iraq and the series of "Color

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261 William O'Mallery, "Central Asia and South Caucasus as an area of operations: Challenges and Constraints," in *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus: Implications for the US Army*, eds. Olga Oliker and Thomas Szanya (Arroyo Center: RAND, 2003), p. 267.

Revolutions” in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan led President Karimov – and many Central Asian leaders – to equate US democracy promotion with regime change. In Kyrgyzstan, the American-based NGO Freedom House even proclaimed “mission accomplished” as President Askar Akayev was forced into exile in 2005.<sup>262</sup>

The increased suspicion of US motives created a climate in which NGO projects dealing with political and economic reforms became difficult to continue. As NGOs began to experience pressure from governments such as the Karimov regime in Uzbekistan, Congress, by limiting security assistance to Uzbekistan, sought to spur some movement towards political reform. Instead, such actions portrayed the US as an unreliable ally and only served to increase frustrations. When Uzbek security forces opened fire on crowds of protesting civilians in Andijan in May 2005, the US could no longer avoid open and direct criticism of the regime. As Secretary Rice became personally engaged in transporting Andijan refugees out of neighboring Kyrgyzstan – against Tashkent’s wishes – the Karimov regime issued an eviction notice demanding the US leave its base in Uzbekistan within 180 days. US relations with Tashkent in the period immediately following this development experienced a temporary setback, and Washington’s influence appeared limited after the loss of its strongest bilateral relationship.<sup>263</sup>

## Current US policy in Central Asia

In a ceremony laden with symbolism, officials and representatives from several nations marked the official opening in August 2007 of a 670-meter bridge over the Pyanj River connecting Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Financed by the US and Norway, the bridge is anticipated to stimulate regional trade between Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the rest of Central Asia through improved market access and export routes. US Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez, on hand for the ceremony, noted that the bridge was a “physical and symbolic link between Central and South Asia.”<sup>264</sup> The Pyanj River Bridge stands as a concrete symbol of the recent shift in US policy in Central Asia.

262 Craig Smith, “US helped to prepare the way for Kyrgyzstan’s uprising,” *New York Times*, 30 March 2005 [online 19 Nov 2008]. While the quotation was most likely taken out of context, it reinforced the pre-existing perception of US involvement in these ‘democratic revolutions’.

263 See Mayer, *Security or Human Rights*.

The State Department restructured its Central Asia bureau in 2006, moving the region out of the European area of responsibility and instead combining it with the South Asia bureau that includes Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. As Secretary Rice noted, the administrative placement of Central Asia together with Europe “really was an artifact of their having been states of the Soviet Union,” and that the new Central and South Asia bureau “represents what we’re trying to do, which is to think of this region as one that will need to be integrated, and that will be a very important goal for us.” Remarking that the Central Asian countries seem to view Afghanistan as part of Central Asia, Rice claimed that Central and South Asia had once been termed by Brzezinski as an “arc of crisis,” but was now an “arc of opportunity.”<sup>265</sup> The overall US foreign policy framework for the region is now one of integration, with Afghanistan acting as the keystone between Central and South Asia.

From a US perspective, there is much at stake in Central Asia. In his March 2007 testimony before the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, newly appointed Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher acknowledged that in this wider region one could find “some of the world’s most dangerous threats – weapons of mass destruction, violent extremism, terrorism, narcotics, poverty, pandemics, illiteracy, and corrupt institutions.”<sup>266</sup> As Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan A. Feigenbaum remarked in September 2007, Central Asia represents a microcosm of a host of critical issues for the US:

Russia resurgent and assertive in its neighborhood; China’s emerging regional and global footprint; Iran’s influence in its region and around the world; energy security at a time of high prices and expanding global demand; democracy promotion among governments and elites who – let’s be candid – do not exactly share our enthusiasm; the future of Afghanistan; debates about, and within, Islam; the challenge of transnational terror-

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264 US State Department, “Afghanistan-Tajikistan Bridge Links Central, South Asia,” distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, *America.gov*, 29 August 2007 [online 20 Nov 2008].

265 US Department of State, “Central Asia now ‘Arc of Opportunity,’ Not ‘Crisis,’ Rice says” distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, *America.gov*, 6 January 2006 [online 20 Nov 2008].

266 Richard A. Boucher, “A Regional Overview of South Asia,” testimony before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs; Subcommittee on Middle East and South Asia, 7 March 2007 (US Department of State [online 20 Nov 2008]).

ism; and economic development amidst sometimes crushing poverty.<sup>267</sup>

The US State Department's five-year strategic plan (2007–12) proposes to address these threats through cooperation with other US government agencies as well as international partners to:

help build regional stability by countering terrorism and narcotics production and resolving conflict; deny proliferation routes through the region; promote regional integration through energy, infrastructure, trade, and communication projects; strengthen democracy and good governance; and create healthy, better educated, and more prosperous populations.

The Bush administration has consistently spoken of its intention to integrate political, economic and security-oriented elements in the foreign policy approach regarding Central Asia, and that these elements are interrelated and complementary. In June 2002, Assistant Secretary of State Lorne Craner testified before Congress that military assistance and human rights “need not be a question of balancing and competing interests, but can, as we’re attempting, be an issue of mutually reinforcing goals.”<sup>268</sup> Four years later, Assistant Secretary Boucher reiterated this approach and expanded upon its rationale:

Our strategy rests on three integrated pillars: security cooperation; our commercial and energy interests; and political and economic reform. We see these three pillars as mutually reinforcing. Genuine stability, in our view, requires a process of democratic change, and stability, in turn, provides for economic development and prosperity. Thus, we are determined to pursue all three sets of interests simultaneously in a balanced way.<sup>269</sup>

267 Evan A. Feigenbaum, “‘Turning the Page’ in US-Turkmenistan Relations,” speech to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC, 17 September 2007 (US Department of State [online 26 Feb 2008]).

268 Lorne Craner, “Balancing Military Assistance and support for human rights in Central Asia,” testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations committee, Subcommittee on Central Asia and the South Caucasus, 27 June 2002, *GlobalSecurity.org* [online 26 Feb 2008].

269 Richard Boucher, Prepared statement for *US Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities Part II*, hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia of the House Committee on International Relations, 26 April 2006 (House Committee on Foreign Affairs [online 20 Nov 2005]).

The manner in which these three groups of interests are pursued, the level of intensity and focus afforded each set of political aims, and the balance between the three in terms of the expenditure of political and financial capital, have varied greatly over the past fifteen years. Since 2005, the center of gravity among the three pillars of foreign policy has shifted yet again, from a security-oriented balance after 9/11 to a more economics-based approach. It should be noted that these three pillars of implemented policy roughly correspond to the three divisions of grand strategy: military, political and economic.

### ***Pillar one: security cooperation***

The Bush administration's reactions to the September 2001 terrorist attacks, and the subsequent impact those events had on US strategic thinking, clearly altered the political realities in Central Asia. The introduction of US combat forces in Afghanistan and the fall of the Taliban regime, combined with strategic partnerships in most of the Central Asian republics to facilitate the execution of Operation Enduring Freedom, have altered the strategic dynamics of the region. Ultimately, though, the war in Afghanistan and the broader war on terrorism have not created new threats or new national interests. Rather, these developments have simply served to intensify, and in some cases reshape, preexisting concerns. These include Islamic extremism, counternarcotics activities, non-proliferation efforts, military reform efforts, and countering Russian and Chinese influence in the region. US security interests are so closely and clearly interconnected that none are able to be analyzed in isolation.

The Central Asian republics, as mentioned earlier, are themselves confronting Islamic extremism to varying degrees. The initial security assistance offered by the Central Asian republics and the more limited assistance they continue to provide originate as much from self-interested motives as from a desire to accommodate the US. Additional benefits include financial rewards from Washington and the more intangible benefit of offering the possibility of conducting a "multi-vector" foreign policy that balances Russian, Chinese and American pressures. In any case common security interests provide a foundation whereby cooperation with the US over OEF has generally been a mutually beneficial proposition.

US restrictions on the sale or transfer of military items to Tajikistan, in effect from 1993 due to the civil war and on-going gov-

ernment abuses, were immediately lifted after 9/11 as Tajikistan became a “front-line state” in the war on terror.<sup>270</sup> The US government provided USD 8 million in military assistance between 2002 and 2007, mostly grants for purchasing non-lethal supplies such as communications equipment. Direct commercial arms sales remained low, totaling less than USD one million for the five-year period after 2001. Tajikistan also received some counterterrorism training through various programs, including the Anti-Terrorism Assistance Program within the Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, De-mining, and Related Activities (NADR) account.

Military assistance to Kyrgyzstan has tripled in the five years since 2001, reaching USD 27 million over the period. Commercial arms sales, non-existent prior to 9/11, totaled nearly USD 62 million from 2002–06. The loss of the military base in Uzbekistan has left Kyrgyzstan as the only host nation in Central Asia. According to the US military, “Manas Air Base is the primary mobility hub for Operation Enduring Freedom. The wing’s around-the-clock mission includes strategic airlift operations, aerial refueling, combat airlift and airdrop, and areomedical evacuation.”<sup>271</sup> Manas provides an irreplaceable power projection capability throughout the region and into China. In addition, the presence of a Russian base in Kant, less than 50 kilometers from Manas, underlines the geopolitical symbolism of the base. Despite some diplomatic crises, it appears the US will retain its base in Kyrgyzstan for the foreseeable future.<sup>272</sup>

Other countries experienced equally dramatic increases in military assistance and counterterrorism training after 2001. A comparative study conducted by the Center for Defense Information of the five-year period before 2001 and five years after reveals substantial changes.<sup>273</sup> Kazakhstan’s military aid doubled; US arms sales rose from USD 182,000 to USD 19 million in the two periods, with USD 20 million projected for 2007 and 2008. Even though Congress eventually restricted military assistance to Uzbekistan, funding increased from around USD 10 million to USD 48 million during the two periods;

270 All figures from Rachel Stohl et al., *US Arms Exports and Military Assistance in the “Global War on Terror,”* Center for Defense Information, World Security Institute (2007) [online 20 Nov 2008].

271 US Air Force, “376 AEW Fact Sheet,” 376<sup>th</sup> AEW *Manas Air Base* [online 20 Nov 2008].

272 John C.K. Daly, “Kyrgyzstan’s Manas Airbase: A Key Asset in the War on Terrorism,” *Terrorism Monitor*, 18 January 2007 (The Jamestown Foundation [online 20 Nov 2008]).

273 Ibid.

commercial arms sales went from USD 6000 to USD 52 million. Turkmenistan, maintaining its long-held neutrality, has accepted only a limited amount of US military assistance both before and since 2001, amounting to just over USD 2 million in each period.

The US preoccupation with counterterrorism and the need for cooperative relationships in the region resulted in military equipment flowing into the region and a relaxation of restrictions on arms sales. None of the Central Asian republics are particularly noteworthy for their democratic institutions or respect for human rights. Further, divisions between internal security forces and the military are not always clear-cut, especially when domestic Islamist groups are seen as posing the greatest threat to the regimes. Military assistance in the form of arms and training, intended to increase military professionalism and strengthen counterinsurgency efforts, necessarily benefits the authoritarian regimes that receive it. Some members of Congress have raised concerns over the possibility that some Uzbek security forces involved in the mass killings at Andijan may have received US military training.<sup>274</sup>

Viewed from an ideological standpoint, military to military cooperation offers both positive and negative elements. Military equipment and training undoubtedly strengthen the position of authoritarian leaders in Central Asia. However, while target states benefit by building up much-needed capabilities and increase the competencies of their armed forces, such training may also be seen as a method for the United States and NATO to promote military professionalism. As Kurt Meppen argues, “western military training teaches soldiers the value of personal initiative and decision-making skills, intrinsic qualities in later establishing economic reform and a stable economic middle class” and “can impart to individuals the skills necessary for a just society and positive social development.”<sup>275</sup>

NATO has emphasized military reforms and interoperability with alliance forces through Central Asian participation in the Partnership for Peace program, in which all countries are members. The alliance’s interest in military cooperation changed with NATO’s involvement in Afghanistan and its assumption of leadership in 2003 of the Interna-

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274 Ann Scott Tyson and Robin Wright, “Crackdown muddies US-Uzbek relations,” *Washington Post*, 4 June 2005 [online 20 Nov 2008].

275 Kurt Meppen, “US-Uzbek Bilateral Relations: Policy Options” in *Anatomy of a Crisis: US-Uzbek Relations 2001–2005*, ed. Svante Cornell, Silk Road Paper, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program (John Hopkins University-SAIS and Uppsala University, 2006) [online 20 Nov 2008], p. 40–41.



tional Security Assistance Force (ISAF) there. Even though the US was forced to leave its military base in Uzbekistan, the Germans continue to maintain a base at Termiz, in the southern tip of the country near the Afghan border in support of NATO operations.

Joint Kazakh-NATO training exercises in September 2008, part of a cooperative agreement to raise Kazakh military standards to NATO levels, underlined Astana's desire to steer a foreign policy course independent of Russia and NATO's desire to remain active in the region.<sup>276</sup> According to analyst Richard Weitz, "NATO has become engaged in a long-term project to promote stability and security in Central Asia."<sup>277</sup> Weitz outlines the problems NATO has had in the region with its limited political leverage, its "modest progress" in military reforms, and the pervasive view of NATO among Central Asian governments as no more than a useful supplier of Western military equipment.<sup>278</sup> The United States generally appears to emphasize bilateral military relations in Central Asia, but maintains some cooperative efforts in a NATO framework. This approach allows the US to retain several avenues through which it may pursue its traditional security interests.

Central Asia's longstanding history as a transit route, its geographic location, poor economic conditions, and its weak central governments has made the region a prime smuggling route. Having inherited from the Soviet Union a substantial infrastructure of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons facilities, securing these materials in countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has long been a priority for the US. The main avenue for this endeavor has been assistance through the Cooperative Threat Reduction program that has decommissioned nuclear facilities, cleaned up weapons laboratories, transferred radioactive materials to secure locations, and found alternate and peaceful employment for former weapons scientists.

A broad range of programs administered by the Departments of Energy, State and Defense are also involved in non-proliferation activities. A major focus of these activities is to increase the proficiency and effectiveness of border security throughout Central Asia by funding training programs and equipment purchases through initiatives such as the Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) program.

276 *RFE/RL*, "Kazakhstan, NATO Hold Joint Military Exercises," 23 September 2008.

277 Richard Weitz, "Analysis: Renewing Central Asian Partnerships," *NATO Review* (autumn 2006) [online 20 Nov 2008].

278 *Ibid.*

In Tajikistan, for instance, the State Department describes the EXBS program as working with “Tajik export control officials, customs authorities, and border guards to combat the transshipment and export of WMD related and illegal dual use technology items, and seeks to reduce overall border security violations.”<sup>279</sup> The Tajik-Afghan border is of particular concern to the US, as a lack of training, funds and inadequate patrolling capacity makes border control a major challenge to stability and progress in Tajikistan. In neighboring Kyrgyzstan, EXBS “helps Kyrgyz officials better detect, interdict, and prevent shipments of weapons and WMD components and other illicit items” through programs that “train and equip personnel at border crossing points, and provide training for customs and border police.”<sup>280</sup>

In 2003, President Bush announced the creation of the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). Rather than a formal organization, the PSI “envisions partnerships of states working in concert, employing their national capabilities to develop a broad range of legal, diplomatic, economic, military, and other tools to interdict shipments” of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>281</sup> As of November 2007, the State Department listed 86 countries as participants in PSI, including all the countries of Central Asia.<sup>282</sup> As one report for Congress noted, however, the lack of any formal mechanisms, institutions, or binding agreements provides a weak foundation that relies heavily on voluntary participation without any means of measuring the initiative’s success.<sup>283</sup> In any regard, nonproliferation remains a central security concern – especially in the context of the war on terror – in which the US has consistently invested considerable effort and financial resources.

As extremist groups in Central Asia rely on revenues from the narcotics trade, there are close links between the war on terror and counternarcotics efforts. Afghanistan has experienced a substantial upsurge in opium production since 2001, and one main export route transits

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279 US Department of State, “US Assistance to Tajikistan – Fiscal Year 2006,” fact sheet, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 28 November 2006 [online 20 Nov 2008].

280 US Department of State, US Assistance to the Kyrgyz Republic – Fiscal Year 2006,” fact sheet, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 28 November 2006 [online 20 Nov 2008].

281 US Department of State, “Proliferation Security Initiative Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ),” fact sheet, Bureau of Nonproliferation, 26 May 2005 [online 20 Nov 2008].

282 US Department of State, “Proliferation Security Initiative Participants,” Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation [online 4 Mar 2008].

283 Mary Beth Nikitin, *Proliferation Security Initiative*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2008), *Federation for American Scientists* [online 20 Nov 2008], p. 3.

Central Asia. In addition to funding extremism, narcotics smuggling also weakens vulnerable institutional structures due to increased corruption, and exacerbates social problems such as drug addiction and the spread of infectious diseases. A number of US agencies administer programs designed to bolster counternarcotics efforts in the region, and offer training provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Agency and the US Customs Service.<sup>284</sup> A substantial portion of US security assistance to Central Asia, even after 2001, has been devoted to border security and nonproliferation.

Tajikistan again stands out as a prioritized case. Secretary Boucher testified that “since the withdrawal of Russian Border Forces from the Tajikistan–Afghanistan border last year [2005], we have intensified our assistance efforts with European Union partners to build and equip a network of outposts on that border and to ensure the border troops receive training, equipment and salaries to do their jobs.”<sup>285</sup> Much of the US efforts in this regard parallel counter-proliferation assistance, especially in emphasizing the need for improved border security. The ongoing war in Afghanistan presents an opportunity for the US to address both interdiction and crop suppression. As with many issues in Central Asia, the symbiotic relationship between the region and its southerly neighbor Afghanistan creates a complex web of policies and interests.

### ***Pillar two: economic and energy cooperation***

While security interests seemed to dominate US policy immediately after 9/11, the theme most often stressed by diplomats and administration officials is that of economic development and integration. Secretary Boucher described US efforts in this field as a way to:

Foster inter- and intra-regional energy trade, investment, and competition through technical assistance and coordination with relevant international financial institutions. Likewise, diversification of Central Asian economies and the growth of small- and medium-size enterprises outside the energy sector can help create new jobs in the region to extend prosperity. When possible, assistance programs should increasingly incorporate regional links, whether the focus is roads, energy, education, or even

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<sup>284</sup> Nichol, *Central Asia's Security*.

<sup>285</sup> Boucher, Prepared statement for *US Policy in Central Asia*.

training exchanges to include participants from neighboring countries.<sup>286</sup>

To this end, Secretary of State Rice unveiled in October 2005 the Central Asian Infrastructure Initiative (CAII), administered by the US Trade and Development Agency (USTDA) and closely coordinated with the State Department, Commerce Department and the US Trade Representative. According to a USTDA press release, the CAII intends to “target activities in the areas of energy, transportation, and communications that promote cooperation among the countries in the region and their integration into the global economy.”<sup>287</sup> Another program aimed at furthering these objectives, the Central Asia Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA), “creates a mechanism for discussion on mutual issues relating to trade, investment, development, regional cooperation, economics, and regulatory frameworks” and constitutes a “major component of the US agenda” in the region. The TIFA Council gathers together both the private and public sectors within Central Asia and meets once a year to discuss trade issues such as cooperation on telecommunications, regional water planning, modernizing customs clearance procedures, and developing a regional energy market. Although the CAII and the TIFA symbolize the new direction of US policy in the region, the concrete manifestations of these initiatives are more difficult to observe, especially given their limited budgetary allotments.

Energy initiatives have featured prominently in US policy as a pathway to regional integration and cooperation in Central Asia, as well as a means of connecting Central Asia to energy-hungry South Asian nations such as Pakistan and India. The Central Asian nations have longstanding disagreements over the distribution of energy resources. The upstream countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can produce hydroelectric power: the downstream agricultural countries of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan require substantial quantities of water but have natural gas supplies needed for heating and cooking by the upstream states. Finding mutually beneficial solutions may not only stimulate economic growth and improve living standards, but may also reduce political tensions in the region. Electricity generated in Tajikistan can be sent southwards to Afghanistan, thereby assisting re-

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286 Ibid.

287 US Trade and Development Agency, “USTDA Launches Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative,” press release, 14 October 2005 [online 20 Nov 2008].

construction efforts and ultimately acting as a stabilizing – and therefore strategic – factor. As Secretary Boucher noted,

one of our leading objectives is to fund a greatly expanded Afghan power grid, with connections to energy sources in Central Asia. It's a winning solution for both sides, providing much-needed energy to Afghanistan and serving as a major source of future revenue for countries like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>288</sup>

Afghanistan has emerged as a defining element in US policy in Central Asia. While many US national security interests noted in the previous section are fundamental in nature and therefore pre-date Operation Enduring Freedom, the invasion of Afghanistan has opened up new possibilities for US economic policy. In more recent US policy conceptualizations, Afghanistan plays a key role by functioning as a bridge between Central and South Asia, as well as providing a starting point for US efforts to integrate the region economically. In a 2006 article in the State Department's magazine *State*, Central Asian diplomats James DeHart and Tristram Perry wrote – perhaps prematurely – that “US success in Afghanistan allowed the Department a fresh perspective on Central Asia's place in the broader region,” and they noted how a recent US-sponsored conference examined how “the Central Asian states can help break Afghanistan out of its geographic isolation and give it access to global markets.”<sup>289</sup> Failure to secure a successful outcome in Afghanistan in many ways threatens the successful implementation of American regional strategy in Central Asia.

The US makes a similar argument about the hydrocarbon-rich states of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – as energy exporters in need of increased access to global markets. The US has long supported the development of multiple export routes for the substantial oil and gas resources found in this landlocked region. It has devoted considerable efforts to promoting alternative routes that avoid countries that are politically at odds with the US, namely Iran, Russia and China. With the BTC pipeline now online, the focus has turned to a new export route underneath the Caspian Sea (the Transcaspian Pipeline or TCP) that would become the first step in a pipeline system to Europe. The US Trade and Development Agency in August 2007

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> James DeHart and Tristram Perry, “Central Asian Affairs: Creating new links and new beginnings,” *State Magazine*, July/August 2006 (US Department of State [online 20 Nov 2008]), pp. 40–42.

provided the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) with a USD 1.7 million grant to study economic and technical aspects of the TCP.<sup>290</sup> Meanwhile, continuing instability in Afghanistan has hindered further progress on the ambitious southerly gas route from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India.

In his 2006 testimony, Secretary Boucher stated that the US supports

establishing multiple, commercially viable pipelines and other new energy transportation routes, because the United States believes that diversification of energy transport routes to and from Central Asia increases stability and energy security, not just regionally but throughout the world.<sup>291</sup>

During that same hearing, USAID official Drew W. Luten echoed this sentiment, arguing that “the United States, as a significant energy importer, has a vital interest in ensuring that efficient export outlets are developed and that Central Asia emerges as an important source of energy in the years ahead, not just for the United States but for the world market.”<sup>292</sup>

The political and economic dynamics of Central Asia experienced a potentially course-altering shift in December 2006 with the death of Turkmenistan’s President Saparmurat Niyazov. His replacement, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, signaled the possibility of a different political course with increased domestic openness and foreign policy flexibility. In the wake of a May 2007 announcement of an agreement between Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia to expand a pipeline running northwards into Russia, a series of high-level US delegations traveled to Ashgabat, including State Department officials and CENTCOM commander Admiral William Fallon. President Berdymukhammedov also met with US Secretary of State Rice while in New York for the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>293</sup>

290 US Trade and Development Agency, “USTDA Grant Launches Study of Trans-Caspian Gas and Oil Pipelines,” *USTDA Update*, vol. 14, issue 2 (fall 2007) [online 20 Nov 2008], p. 6.

291 Boucher, Prepared statement for US Policy in Central Asia.

292 Drew W. Luten, *Prepared statement for US Policy in Central Asia: Balancing Priorities* (Part II), Hearing before the House Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, 26 April 2006 (House Committee on Foreign Affairs [online 20 Nov]).

293 Richard Weitz, “Berdymukhammedov-Rice Meeting Highlights US Interests in Turkmenistan’s Energy,” *CACI Analyst*, 3 October 2007 (Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center [online 20 Nov 2008]).

The diplomatic activity appeared to have some effect when Berdymukhammedov said during his US visit that “Turkmenistan gives primary importance to developing relations with the United States, particularly in oil and gas.”<sup>294</sup> Prior to the twelfth annual Turkmenistan Oil and Gas Exhibition in November 2007 that attracted 150 companies from 21 countries, Berdymukhammedov declared that his country’s energy policy prioritized the “formation of a multi-variant system of supplies of Turkmen fuel to world markets” along with its strategic energy partners “Russia, China, and other countries.” US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman attended the conference, becoming the highest ranking US official to visit Turkmenistan in years.<sup>295</sup> The results of Turkmenistan’s independent audit in October 2008, confirming the country’s claims of holding “world class” natural gas reserves, have only served to intensify interest in energy exports.

The United States views government transparency as closely related to, and as mutually reinforcing, political reforms and economic growth. In a 2007 panel discussion, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Evan Feigenbaum recounted a meeting with a Tajik official, during which Feigenbaum began discussing the rule of law:

He interrupted me in the middle of my sentence and he said, “There you go again with your democracy agenda. I don’t want to talk about democracy. I want to talk about investment and trade.” And I said, “Well, I am talking about investment and trade because American companies will not invest here if you can take a contract and simply rip it up; if there is no judicial redress in the event of a contractual dispute.” So if you look at where we focus programmatically, if you look at where we put our money, we’re increasingly focused on building capacity in these countries in ways that really, I think, have implications for more than one basket [of interests].<sup>296</sup>

### ***Pillar three: political and economic reform***

The countries of Central Asia are among the most authoritarian in the world, according to the independent NGO Freedom House. In its latest

294 John C.K. Daly, “Analysis: Turkmenistan sides with Kremlin,” *UPI.com*, 30 November 2007 [online 13 Mar 2008].

295 *RFE/RL*, “Western Oil Officials Converge on Turkmenistan,” 14 November 2007 [online 20 Nov 2008].

296 Council on Foreign Relations, “The Pursuit of Black Gold: Pipeline Politics on the Caspian Sea,” panel discussion hosted at CFR, 13 November 2007 [online 20 Nov 2008].

Freedom in the World survey, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were determined to be “not free;” Kyrgyzstan was determined to be “partly free” by the survey. During the 1990s, the limited political and civil liberties existing in these countries were restricted to an even greater degree. Prior to the intensified US engagement with the region in 2001, none were considered even partly free. Since 2000, both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have marginally improved their rating, while Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have retained constantly poor ratings. Uzbekistan fell slightly and thereby was given the worst score possible in both categories (political rights and civil liberties), sharing the bottom of the rankings with the likes of Burma, North Korea, Libya, and neighboring Turkmenistan.<sup>297</sup>

In such a repressive political climate, the task of encouraging democratic reforms and institution-building becomes a challenging one. The United States has generally attempted to influence the internal political character of other states by pursuing two types of policies. First, state leaders can be pressed to initiate reforms through, for example, public pressure, shaming, binding agreements, or even sanctions. The 2002 Strategic Partnership Agreement between the US and Uzbekistan also contains elements of this top-down approach. This top-down strategy was employed by the European Union through its travel ban on Uzbek leaders after 2005. The other option, a bottom-up approach, seeks to lay the foundations for democratic institutions and civic organizations by promoting certain aspects of civil society that are necessary for a healthy democracy. This represents the bulk of US democracy promotion, the majority of which is carried out by USAID and its NGO subcontractors. According to Assistant Administrator for USAID Drew Luten, the agency follows a three-pronged strategy for development assistance in Central Asia: “promoting a democratic culture,” “bolstering economic growth and reform,” and “facilitating social transition through more effective and equitable approaches to health and education.”<sup>298</sup>

The US State Department outlined its efforts to promote democracy throughout 2006 in this way:

Our efforts focused on the three core components of a working democracy that must be present if human rights are to be effec-

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297 *Freedom House*, “Freedom in the World Report 2008”; *Freedom House*, “Freedom in the World Country Ratings 1972–2007.”

298 Luten, *Prepared statement for US Policy in Central Asia*.



tively exercised and protected: One – a free and fair elections process, with a level playing field to ensure genuine competition; Two – good governance, with representative, transparent and accountable institutions operating under the rule of law, including independent legislatures and judiciaries; and Three – a robust civil society and independent media that can keep government honest, keep citizens engaged, and keep reforms on track.<sup>299</sup>

Electoral programs include political party assistance and advising local governmental institutions, as well as voter education programs and election monitoring training. Good governance efforts have included judicial training centers for judges, rule of law training for lawyers, judges and legislators, and local government programs that emphasize decentralization. Programs designed to strengthen civil society include assistance to establish free legal clinics staffed by law students, civic education and youth advocacy programs, and student exchange programs that expose Central Asian citizens to a democratic free market society.

These types of programs have increasingly come under pressure from state leaders, especially since 2003. According to the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor:

In Central Asia, restrictions on civil society and opposition political parties that began after the so-called Color Revolutions remained and in some cases increased. Government restrictions on civil society were often directed at US implementing partners, many of which had to shut down their operations during the last two years.<sup>300</sup>

In addition, the US has also observed “backsliding” by Central Asian countries on key democracy indicators such as press freedom, judicial independence, and conducting free and fair elections. In response, the US has focused its efforts on “strengthening civil society; bolstering independent media; protecting human rights; and promoting reform at the local levels.”<sup>301</sup> The effects of democracy promotion programs are

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299 US Department of State, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The US Record 2006*, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 5 April 2007 [online 20 Nov 2008], p. iii.

300 US Department of State, *Supporting Human Rights and Democracy*, p. 188.

301 Luten, *Prepared statement for US Policy in Central Asia*.

difficult to measure in any quantitative way, noted a report to Congress by the National Endowment for Democracy, calling the task “overwhelming, if not impossible.” Further complicating democracy promotion efforts are reports of non-existent conceptual frameworks, guides or educational materials for those engaged in promoting democracy.<sup>302</sup>

Less controversial for Central Asian leaders are US economic assistance programs, which contain elements of political and social reform. The US directs a substantial amount of its foreign aid towards investment and development projects within the Central Asian states. According to the State Department, the economic restructuring program in Kazakhstan

... supports trade and investment, business and economic development and removal of investment constraints, economics and business education, and micro-enterprise development. [US Government] programs also support customs reform, fiscal and banking reform, pension reform, mortgage industry development, accounting reform, small and medium enterprises training and advisory services.<sup>303</sup>

In other Central Asian countries, market reform programs have funneled assistance to similar projects that support ground-level, sustainable economic growth. In addition, such investment programs often involve US corporations and therefore serve US economic and corporate interests as well. Tellingly, while total US assistance to the region is declining, economic assistance remains steady or is increasing.<sup>304</sup> Recalling the strong linkages between economic and political freedoms expressed in US strategic documents such as the 2006 NSS, it appears that the US, after encountering resistance to democracy promotion efforts in Central Asia, has instead begun emphasizing economic aspects with the same ideological goals in mind.

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302 Susan B. Epstein, et.al. *Democracy promotion: Cornerstone of US Foreign Policy*, CRS Report for Congress (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), *Federation for American Scientists* [online 20 Nov 2008], p. 17.

303 US Department of State, “US Assistance to Kazakhstan – Fiscal Year 2003-2003,” fact sheet, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, 17 February 2004 [online 11 Mar 2008].

304 US Agency for International Development, *Congressional Budget Justification Foreign Operations Fiscal Year 2009* [online 21 Nov 2008], pp. 556–604.

## Conclusions: US strategy in Central Asia

Situated at the apex of the arc of instability, Central Asia encapsulates the entire collection of US interests throughout the globe in addition to harboring all of the threats to those interests. Just as other observers have noted, Central Asia is indeed a microcosm of the world as seen through the prism of US grand strategy. As such, a number of elements from the broader global strategy are present in the regional one, both by chance and by design. Given the host of strategic interests present in Central Asia, one might expect the US to prioritize this region across the three categories of national power. Surprisingly, the totality of US efforts reveals less strategic emphasis than the sum of its parts might suggest. While the US strives for primacy and the prevention of regional hegemonic powers – and it does pursue such goals in Central Asia – the political effort and financial resources devoted to the region reflect the practical limitations facing the US in the region. As mentioned earlier, success in Washington’s Central Asia strategy is in many ways dependent on a successful outcome in Afghanistan, and it is here the primary focus of US policy rests.

In military terms, the logistical demands of Operation Enduring Freedom exemplified the need for global strategic access. While terrorism and energy had held US interest throughout the 1990s, OEF sparked an unprecedented military presence in the region. This included the establishment of US bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, more limited military cooperation with Tajikistan, and refueling and overflight agreements with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Within weeks, the US had transformed from an outside actor involved in non-proliferation efforts, border security and energy exports to one with a substantial military presence in Central Asia and engaged in a war on the region’s southern border. The unexpected eviction of US troops from Uzbekistan in 2005 weakened the US military’s capacity to support operations in Afghanistan as well as project power in the region, thereby increasing the importance of maintaining its base in Kyrgyzstan as a forward operating site. The United States appears to have replaced Uzbekistan with Kazakhstan in the role of “regional anchor.”

The US continues to view security issues in Central Asia through the lens of the highly prioritized war on terror. Ironically, this has simply reinforced the set of policy issues in focus prior to 9 /11: non-proliferation, WMD site clean-up and security, border security

procedures and military reform. Cooperation in these areas furthers specific US interests and promotes closer bilateral relations. Even if terrorism were to fade as a national security priority, such issues would remain pressing concerns. Lacking political and practical avenues to pursue its interests in Central Asia and currently preoccupied with counterterrorism operations on the region's fringes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Washington's strategy is more restrained and focused on long-term gains. Given the spectrum of security interests present in the region, this static condition has the potential to rapidly create more pressing strategic concerns and crises.

The economic component of US grand strategy, which includes access to energy supplies, has been the most active and evolving element of US Central Asia strategy during the final years of the Bush administration. Similar to US security interests in the region, the emphasis on economic development and pipeline export routes represents a continuation of policies from the 1990s. Free market reforms and the promotion of foreign investment are seen both as commercial opportunities for US firms to gain new markets as well as a means of nudging along economic reforms that may eventually lead to political reforms.

While pipeline projects and geo-economics capture the imagination of many Central Asia observers, the actual political processes involved in negotiating and lobbying for a particular project are painfully slow and unpredictable. While the US strongly advocates westerly and southeasterly routes from the Caspian Sea, the effects of such support are difficult to observe and measure. While the US clearly played a political role in the construction of the BTC pipeline, it remains unclear whether this success can be replicated in the form of a trans-Caspian route or, even more unlikely, a trans-Afghan route to Pakistan and India. The change of leadership in Turkmenistan has offered a new twist in Central Asian energy politics, and it remains to be seen whether Berdymukhammedov will embrace Western involvement or continue to send the country's gas exports north to Russia and east to China. The energy reserves in Central Asia alone are hardly a prize for the US, but US grand strategy emphasizes open and accessible world energy markets that ultimately benefit the US economy. US strategic interests are also served by limiting Russian influence in the region and depriving the re-emerging power of an important economic base.

In the political and diplomatic realms, the main tenets of transformational diplomacy are evident in US Central Asian policy. The interdependent nature of the international system leads the US to focus on states' character and their internal governance structures, while emphasizing a direct connection with populations outside the capital cities and the use of technology to spread American culture and ideas. Without any real options for pursuing multilateral or regional frameworks such as the SCO, the US remains dependent on maintaining good bilateral relations. This too is consistent with the global pattern, where such relationships are favored over multilateral organizations.

Despite some setbacks, the US continues to fund and operate an extensive set of democracy promotion programs based on developing civil society, reforming governmental institutions, strengthening independent media outlets and improving election processes. While most Central Asian regimes have restricted the activities of the NGOs responsible for implementation, limited programming continues. Correspondingly, few diplomatic pressures are placed on the regimes themselves in an attempt to maintain some type of working relationship. Democracy and political reform efforts expanded rapidly after 2001, only to be curtailed again three years later as Central Asian leaders became nervous. The US' focus has now shifted to economic reforms as a means of positioning and preparing these states for eventual political reforms.

Surprisingly, the US does not appear to prioritize Central Asia despite the seeming confluence of strategic factors in the region. Counter-terrorism, WMD proliferation, transnational criminal networks, energy resources, poverty, disease and the lack of political reforms are overlaid by great power politics. Despite this potent combination, US assistance levels in the region are falling. One expert observed, "It is hard to imagine a wider gulf between the US's real interests and its budgetary actions" in Central Asia.<sup>305</sup> The region attracts only sporadic attention from high-ranking political leaders from the Bush administration, nor is it often the subject of Congressional hearings. Apart from the period 2004–05, the region has existed outside Washington's area of interest, though both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have recently awakened some interest.

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305 Joshua Kucera, "US AID Budget To Eurasia: A Monument to 'Interagency Pettiness'," *Eurasianet.org*, 12 February 2008 [online 12 Mar 2008].

Based on US regional strategy in Central Asia, as stated and implemented, one can see a number of parallels to US strategy on a global level. Within both fundamental components of US strategy, namely geopolitics and ideology, each of the three elements of grand strategy – military, political and economic – are represented on both the regional and the global level. These parallels are perhaps more apparent when placed in a table such as the one below.

### Elements of US Grand Strategy in Central Asia

		Global	Central Asia
Geopolitical	Military	Strategic access, base restructuring, prevent regional powers, focus on both traditional war and COIN in force structure and weapons systems	Uzbek and Kyrgyz bases, Afghanistan support, Non-prolif. /border efforts, bilateral/NATO training cooperation
	Political	Bilateral relationships, less institutions, more flexibility, transformational diplomacy, counter regional powers	Counter Russian (Chinese) influence, pull political center of gravity toward Afghanistan, bilateral relationships with Uzbeks, Kazakhs
	Economic	Secure energy resources, new markets	Pipeline geo-economics, pull region southwards with CAII, other initiatives
Ideological	Military	Increased focus on stabilization, reconstruction, humanitarian operations – AFRICOM model	Training for increased professionalism (incl. human rights, anti-corruption) and security in Central Asian states, counternarcotics efforts
	Political	Democracy promotion, good governance programs, transformational diplomacy	Limited democracy promotion, good governance & civil society programs
	Economic	Economic liberty connected to political liberty, Millennium program	Economic development and reforms as means to prepare region for political reform

Table 2: Summary table of US grand strategy in Central Asia

# Conclusions

In broader terms, US grand strategy since the end of the Cold War has evolved and expanded in order to address security threats arising from non-traditional actors such as terrorist groups and rogue states. The 2001 terrorist attacks reminded Americans that ocean buffer zones offered little protection in a modern, globalized, interdependent world with technology available to non-state groups that could seriously harm the US mainland. The growing strategic consensus appears to have settled on a two-pronged approach. An active forward military posture, combined with ideologically inspired policies of democratic and economic reforms, seeks to address threats emanating from within other states. The large-scale global presence required to stabilize vulnerable regions also serves to counter the influence of rising powers around the globe. It is worth recalling the similar focus of the 1992 DPG, a fact that underscores the continuity in US strategic thinking.<sup>306</sup> As this study has shown, there is substantial evidence that the US actively plans and implements policy reflecting each part of this dual approach. Thus, the two ever-present underlying components of US grand strategy – geopolitics and ideology – continue to drive American strategic thinking.

## **Geopolitics and ideology: synergy**

The two reoccurring elements in US grand strategy, geopolitics and ideology, are primary drivers of US policy in Central Asia. The administration's strategy to redirect the region's economic and political focus south and east towards Afghanistan, Pakistan and India is fundamentally motivated by geopolitical interests. Attempting to disconnect

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<sup>306</sup> See chapter two of this study.

Central Asia from its natural trading partner Russia, as well as the rapidly expanding economic presence of the Chinese, may eventually benefit the Central Asian countries. However, endeavoring to direct the region's economic activity southwards toward an unstable and conflict-filled Afghanistan at this point seems better designed to serve US interests than those of Central Asia. In any case, some synergy exists between US geopolitical interests and its ideological ones.

The US routinely denies any great power competition or zero-sum game thinking in its approach to Central Asia, but consistently acts to counter Russian influence. By integrating the Central Asian republics into the NATO system through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and its intense lobbying for pipeline export routes that avoid Russian soil, the US has pursued policies that sought to limit Russian influence. In 1998, then energy secretary Bill Richardson was particularly candid about this fact when commenting on Caspian energy:

This is about America's energy security, which depends on diversifying our sources of oil and gas worldwide. It's also about preventing strategic inroads by those who don't share our values. We're trying to move these newly independent countries toward the West. We would like to see them reliant on Western commercial and political interests rather than going another way. We've made a substantial political investment in the Caspian, and it's very important to us that both the pipeline and the politics come out right.<sup>307</sup>

Richardson's perspective remains highly relevant even as current US officials are unwilling to express such thoughts openly. The Central Asian energy producers would indeed benefit from increased market access, as US officials argue, especially considering the discount prices Russia pays. Russian interests would be most affected by new export routes for oil and gas, as it has become economically dependent on reselling Central Asian energy to Europe while it develops new domestic gas fields. The revenues earned from these transactions have helped to fuel Russia's military revitalization. Therefore, increasing the region's economic options benefits the Central Asian republics and potentially weakens an increasingly assertive Russia. The geopolitical aspect of

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307 Stephen Kinzer, "On Piping Out Caspian Oil, US Insists the Cheaper, Shorter Way isn't Better," *New York Times*, 8 November 1998 [online 12 Mar 2008].



Washington's efforts to vector Central Asia west and south are unmistakable. As Stephen Blank has argued:

energy access, though important, is not and should not be the primary driver of US policy here. Rather it is a means to an end ... the driving force behind US policy is anti-monopoly ... This American policy of defending the independence, integrity, and security of these states extends the long-established vital geostrategic interest of the United States in forestalling the rise of any Eurasian empire in either continent that could challenge it.<sup>308</sup>

In this regard, the ideological component of US strategy acts to reinforce the geopolitical repositioning. Despite Russia's historical dominance in the region, the Central Asian countries have increasingly resorted to a so-called multi-vector approach to foreign policy. Countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan established bilateral relationships with the US as a way to balance Russian pressures, a pattern also adopted by Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Secretary of State Rice's visit to Kazakhstan in October 2008, shortly after joint Kazakh-NATO military exercises, reflects a new chapter in geopolitical relationships. In recent years, bilateral relations with China have also acted as a balancer. This mechanism has been institutionalized by the SCO and remains one of the greatest benefits of membership for the Central Asian states. Another benefit of SCO membership is regime security. As one report noted, "it is not unfair to categorize the SCO as a pact for regime survival," a "pro-status quo" coalition.<sup>309</sup> The United States, through its programs of democracy promotion and economic reform, is very much a revisionary anti-status quo actor seeking to alter the political landscape in the region.

Just as the US argues that its economic policies are in the best interests of the citizens of Central Asia, so too are its policies of democratic reform. In promoting representative government institutions, the US also weakens Russian and Chinese influence over the authoritarian regimes in the region. Of course, both autocrats and democrats alike have various rationales for their foreign policies, independent of their particular form of government. Autocratic regimes, however, have one overriding interest: retaining power. In Kazakhstan,

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<sup>308</sup> Stephen Blank, *US Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them* (Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), p. 3.

<sup>309</sup> Bailes et al., *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, p. 9.

Tajikistan and even Uzbekistan, if widespread civil unrest ever threatens the regime's continued hold on power, the appeal for assistance will most likely be directed towards Moscow or Beijing. In this way, Russia and China have more leverage with which to influence the policy decisions of authoritarian regimes. Simply advocating democratic reforms, a process that entails eventual regime change, sets the US on a collision course with the two powers. US geopolitical and ideological interests are therefore in alignment in Central Asia insofar as they counter Russian (and to some extent Chinese) influence in the region.

### **Geopolitics and ideology: conflict**

At the same time, these two elements also work against each other in the practical implementation of US policy in the region. The synergy noted above exists on a strategic and theoretical level focused on future outcomes over time. In the short term, the US remains somewhat limited by its ideological rhetoric and commitment to democratic principles. Although the US often acts pragmatically and in ways that run counter to the ideological rhetoric of freedom and democracy, such principles nevertheless hinder the ability of the US to act in wholly realpolitik fashion. The US record in Uzbekistan stands as a testament to this fact: despite substantial military assistance and reports of rendition to Uzbek prisons, the US was unable to continue the bilateral relationship largely due to ideologically motivated actions elsewhere by the administration and Congress.

US support for various actors involved in the Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan – and the public acknowledgement of such support – fueled resentment and suspicion throughout Central Asia. Grouping these activities together with US NGO democracy promotion programs, authoritarian regimes delivered what Thomas Carothers described as a “backlash” against US democracy efforts. Why would any regime cooperate with a nation that endeavors to topple it? Therein lies the current conundrum for US policymakers: how to accomplish their geopolitically inspired strategic goals – which entail close cooperation with partner governments – while working towards political reforms that threaten that same partner. Even more challenging for the US is the willingness of other actors, such as China or Russia, to offer military and economic support to the Central Asian regimes without the hassle of such bothersome reforms.

Due to this self-imposed limitation, the US will experience difficulties in competing for influence with Russia or China in Central Asia as long as the ideological component of US grand strategy remains. It cannot offer long-term and unquestioning support for the regimes due to this ideological “handicap,” and therefore cannot be regarded as a completely reliable ally. The rise and sudden fall of US engagement from 2001–05 can be seen as a failed experiment: the administration’s desire for short-term gains in the war on terror revealed the long-term weakness of US partnerships in the region. Close strategic partnerships with authoritarian regimes, such as the one between the US and Uzbekistan, seem to be untenable over the long term. Washington might therefore have limited access to Central Asian leaders and therefore some ability to influence political and strategic outcomes, but is unlikely to gain any real permanent political foothold in the region.

Several other fundamental conflicts exist between US geopolitical ambitions and its efforts to promote democratic forms of government. While Russia and China indeed might find it easier to influence autocratic leaders in Central Asia and interpret US efforts at democracy promotion as counter to their strategic interests, it must not be assumed that the development of democratic states will automatically serve US interests.<sup>310</sup> Anti-Russia policies are not necessarily the same as pro-US policies. As Paul Saunders wrote in a 2007 article for the *National Interest*, “democracies – like all other states – have different interests ... And even when democracies share both values and interests, they often have different priorities.”<sup>311</sup> Furthermore, Saunders argues that public opinion in some regions is such that representative governments would be less likely to cooperate with the US; Egypt and Saudi Arabia can “work with Washington precisely because they are insulated from popular pressure.”<sup>312</sup>

Democracy promotion may also run counter to the US desire for political stability in the region. A comprehensive study of the causes of state failure found regime type to be the most decisive factor: almost all partial democracies in Sub-Saharan Africa failed within the span of a few years, and full democracies were five times more likely to fail than autocratic states. In predominantly Muslim countries, partial and

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310 By the same token, one may also question whether autocratic states share similar long-term interests simply due to their lack of democratic institutions.

311 Paul J. Saunders, “Learning to Appreciate France,” *National Interest online*, 1 March 2007 [online 4 Apr 2008].

312 Ibid.

full democracies faced the same odds, being five times more likely to fail than autocratic regimes.<sup>313</sup> Based on these findings, US programs encouraging the creation of democratic institutions in Central Asia (and elsewhere) work at cross-purposes with US geopolitical interests in regional stability and security.

## **An economic great game**

Despite Strobe Talbot's proclamation that the US hoped to avoid a zero-sum game in Central Asia, it is difficult to avoid the realities of energy politics. With finite resources and increasing demand, there will be winners and losers: Central Asian gas piped eastwards to China deprives Russia or the BTC pipeline of that volume. The existing network of pipelines heavily favors continued Russian dominance of the energy market in the region, though China steadily makes inroads with several projects nearing completion. This may lead to friction between the two countries due to diverging economic interests. Those actors most disadvantaged in the current climate are Europe and the United States. West-flowing pipeline projects are dependent on problematic agreements between partner states and sufficient flows from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Any southerly export route must contend with Afghanistan's continued instability or political uncertainty.

The economic relationships between the Central Asian countries and the regional powers of China and Russia are significant in several ways. Closer economic ties invariably lead to closer political relations, especially when increasing portions of national economies depend on foreign investment. Russia and China desire regime stability and political predictability to protect their interests and growing investments in the region. Theirs are direct and immediate national interests, while the US views Central Asia as important but not crucial. For the United States, it is the conflict in Afghanistan that weighs most heavily. Regional stability and strategic access are deemed necessary for the US and its allies to succeed there. The US involvement in Afghanistan has reinforced existing concerns and increased the stakes for US policy in the region that exceed simple political maneuvering on pipeline routes. Interestingly, while the US remains the

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313 Jack A. Goldstone et al., "State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings," *Center for Global Policy*, 30 September 2000 (George Mason University [online 20 Nov 2008]).

dominant actor on the global stage with Russia and China acting as spoilers to US strategic ambitions, the roles are reversed in Central Asia. Here, the US plays the peripheral role and struggles to secure political access and leverage to further its interests. In this region, multipolarity is indeed a reality.

Ironically, there appears to be broad areas of common interest between Russia, China and the United States. None wish for a further radicalization of Islam in the region or the re-emergence of a Taliban regime, all view the spread of transnational criminal syndicates and narcotics trafficking as a serious problem, all have an interest in combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, and all have an interest in avoiding widespread political instability. Despite this, there has been little real cooperation between the three. The Russian and American military bases in Kyrgyzstan ostensibly have the same counterterrorism mandate, but have no cooperative agenda. While SCO member states have cooperative security efforts, these are largely symbolic in nature. It is particularly challenging to account for the lack of coordination between the US and Russia without viewing the relationship through the lens of geopolitical competition and mutual suspicion over underlying motives. Despite the broad set of US national interests in Central Asia, Washington has apparently chosen to emphasize the economic and energy aspects.

## **The future of US grand strategy**

The strategic outlook at the end of the second Bush administration represents a culmination of trends that integrate geopolitical and ideological elements in a way consistent with past strategies. More than a simple window dressing or casual addition, ideology has increasingly been incorporated as an active strategic element in US policy planning, a tool to help address the more intangible and diffuse threats arising since the end of the Cold War. Despite the sound internal logic of the current approach, some have questioned the sustainability of a grand strategy based on primacy. Questions also arise regarding the practical limitations of pursuing US security through active military, political and economic efforts to provide security and developmental and political assistance to troubled and fragile regions in the arc of instability.

The new geopolitics of Central Asia plainly illustrates the challenges involved when implementing the two-pronged grand strategic

approach taken by the US in an area where both elements must find a sort of synergy. While Central Asia presents unique and long-term challenges to US strategists, similar conditions may also be found in the Middle East and on the African continent. Due to the globalized nature of American primacy, challenges to US freedom of movement and the growing influence of regional actors outside their traditional geopolitical spheres (such as Chinese activities in Africa) will require global capabilities.

Many components of the current grand strategy outlined here enjoy broader support, and have been partially institutionalized, so that radical changes appear unlikely beyond a gradual reduction in ambitiousness. From State and Defense Department officials to US military leaders, there appears to be a growing consensus on the continued need for capabilities that can influence the internal dynamics of other states, including robust counterinsurgency, stabilization and reconstruction forces. There has been a visible shift away from forceful democracy promotion during Bush's second term, towards fundamental building blocks of democratic society such as economic development, humanitarian projects, and good governance. It is important to note the convergence within policymaking circles around such policies. Just as Secretary Rice argued, the boundaries between security, development and democracy have become less clear. Some security policy consensus may evolve as liberal internationalists, human rights advocates, geopolitical realists and ideologically focused neoconservatives increasingly find common ground. There is much in this grand strategy for both political parties to agree upon.

In the end, domestic political or economic pressures may affect the implementation of this ambitious US grand strategy to a much greater degree than pressure from external actors in the international system. The global economic crisis of 2008, combined with long-neglected domestic financial obligations, may cause budget shortfalls in both defense and foreign policy programming. Some analysts have warned of the inherent unsustainability of America's implemented grand strategy in strategic terms. As US strategy in Central Asia demonstrates, America's grand strategy may suffer from underlying conflicts that may be difficult to reconcile. As the new president takes office in 2009, adjustments will most likely affect the scope, rather than the fundamental strategic thinking, of the grand strategy presented here.

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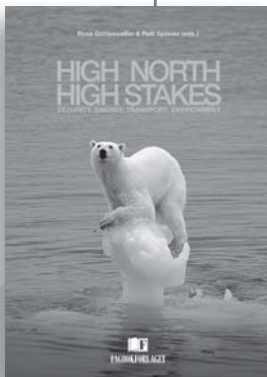
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