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CHARLES E. ZIEGLER

Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and American Foreign Policy

From Indifference to Engagement

ABSTRACT

This paper examines U.S. engagement in Central Asia over the past two decades, with specific reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. While alarmist voices occasionally warn of the threat to American interests from China and Russia through the SCO, the organization's influence appears limited. Washington has engaged it only sporadically, preferring to conduct relations bilaterally with the Central Asian states.

KEYWORDS: Central Asia, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, American foreign policy, China, Russia

THE ARAB SPRING EVENTS THAT BEGAN in 2011 along the Mediterranean littoral fomented deep unease among the authoritarian leaders of former Soviet Central Asia. The situations of the two regions are comparable in many respects—these are Muslim countries with poorly performing economies; large sectors of unemployed or underemployed, disaffected youth; poor governance; and largely unresponsive dictators who have enriched themselves and their families at the expense of the state treasury. Even more so than in the Middle East, however, in Central Asia the interests of three great powers—the U.S., Russia, and China—converge and clash.

Central Asia also hosts a regional grouping—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)—that incorporates two of the great powers and all but

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one of the Central Asian states.¹ The SCO has been called a “club of authoritarians” with good reason: a central goal of these six states has been containing the virus of color revolutions and minimizing Western efforts to promote democracy.

Although Washington and the SCO member states differ on the virtues of democracy, they do share a common interest in preventing extremism and terrorism from destabilizing regimes in the area running from the Caucasus to South Asia, what former U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski once called the “arc of crisis.”² As NATO’s International Security Assistance Force withdraws combat troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014 and the U.S. draws down its military presence, the SCO could assume a greater security role in the broader Central Asian region. Could a more active SCO promote American interests in regional stability and development, or will changing power alignments work against Washington’s priorities in Central Asia?

U.S. policy toward Central Asia and the SCO experienced three distinct phases since the mid-1990s. From 1996, when the Shanghai Five first began discussions on disarmament and confidence-building measures (CBMs), through 2004, Washington was largely indifferent to the organization, assessing it as neither a threat nor an effective regional entity. The Bill Clinton administration’s regional policy consisted of engaging the Central Asian states bilaterally, encouraging their transition to a market economy, promoting democratization, and securing access for Western companies to the region’s hydrocarbon deposits. This approach was essentially replicated by the George W. Bush administration, although relations with Central Asia became far more critical to U.S. security in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the subsequent military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The second phase, from 2005 through 2008, was a period of American hostility and suspicion toward the SCO following on the Astana, Kazakhstan, SCO summit, where the member states urged a timetable for withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan and the closure of U.S. bases in Uzbekistan

1. The members of the SCO are Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Excluding Uzbekistan, the remaining members constituted the SCO’s predecessor, the Shanghai Five. Observer states include Mongolia, India, Pakistan, and Iran. Belarus and Sri Lanka are dialogue partners. Turkmenistan adheres to strict neutrality and is not a member, although President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov attended the June 2012 SCO summit in Beijing. Afghanistan was granted observer status at the 2012 summit, and Turkey was accepted as a dialogue partner.

2. “The Crescent of Crisis: Iran and a Region of Rising Instability,” *Time*, January 15, 1979, p. 18.

and Kyrgyzstan. Neoconservatives, convinced that Russia and China were scheming to supplant the U.S. in Central Asia and undermine the campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, redoubled calls for a unilateral, confrontational approach in the region. In the third phase, from 2009 onward, the Barack Obama administration first attempted to engage the SCO as part of a broader strategy to assist in its efforts to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan, then reverted to a series of bilateral approaches toward the Central Asian states as the SCO's inability to deal with the 2010 turmoil in Kyrgyzstan confirmed its ineffectiveness.

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE SHANGHAI GROUP

In the decade from the collapse of the Soviet Union to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American foreign policy struggled to find direction.³ Walter Russell Mead describes this as “a bipartisan age of narcissism and hubris,” in which Americans believed their political and economic system had triumphed in a Fukuyama-style end of history. The U.S. was so dominant on the world stage that most Americans could not envision a serious challenge to their national security.⁴ In foreign policy the Clinton administration pursued four broad goals: reducing the prospects for major war, securing and eliminating weapons of mass destruction inherited by the successor states of the Soviet Union, promoting a more open global economy, and encouraging the growth of democracy and human rights.⁵ Each of these goals was reflected in policy toward Central Asia, though this took the form of bilateralism rather than engagement with the Shanghai Five as a group, which at this stage was not yet prepared to act collectively.⁶

3. This section draws on the author's “U.S. Strategy in Central Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (in Russian), *Mirovaia Ekonomika i Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia* [World economy and international relations] 4 (2005), pp. 13–22. It should be noted that for the first six years of its existence, the organization was referred to as the Shanghai Five, and only formally became the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2001.

4. Walter Russell Mead, *Power, Terror, Peace, and War: America's Grand Strategy in a World at Risk* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

5. Stephen M. Walt, “Two Cheers for Clinton's Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 79:2 (March/April 2000), pp. 63–79.

6. As Flemming Spildsboel Hansen points out, although one key member of the Shanghai Five—China—was embroiled in a serious dispute with the U.S. over Taiwan in 1996, the Shanghai Five summit in April 1996 focused exclusively on internal issues. See Hansen, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,” *Asian Affairs* 34:2 (July 2008), pp. 217–32.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. granted diplomatic recognition to the five newly independent states in Central Asia, and Congress enacted the Freedom Support Act of 1992, legislation that sought to bring American laws into line with the new geopolitical situation of 15 independent states. The Freedom Support Act encouraged creation of open markets; promoted the establishment of democracy and civil society; developed mechanisms to encourage trade, economic cooperation, and scholarly exchanges; and provided funds for nonproliferation and disarmament. The goal of this legislation was to enhance U.S. national security by preventing a return of the newly independent states to communism and, particularly in Central Asia, forestalling the emergence of religious extremism.

One of Washington's most important initial goals in Central Asia was to secure control of nuclear weapons and remove them from the region. These weapons consisted of bombers, air-launched cruise missiles, and over 1,000 warheads on strategic missiles located in Kazakhstan. Toward this end, Vice President Al Gore and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the Cooperative Threat Reduction Agreement in December 1993. During 1994–95 the warheads and bombers were sent to Russia for safekeeping, and the missile silos and launchers were subsequently destroyed. Kazakhstan's willingness to deal with this issue forthrightly and with dispatch earned the country profuse thanks from the U.S., and a promise of significant economic and diplomatic assistance.

American policy toward Central Asia and the Caucasus in the Clinton administration consisted of four dimensions: promoting democracy and civil society, supporting privatization and the creation of free market economies, resolving debilitating frozen conflicts such as those in the Caucasus, and integrating the small states of the region with the larger international community. Accessing the region's huge oil reserves was another priority for the U.S. Successful economic and political reforms were expected to contribute to stability and would benefit the broader region; failure could breed terrorism, religious and political extremism, and war. Regional integration would ensure that neo-imperial ambitions on the part of Russia (or other great powers) did not lead to a repeat of the 19th century Great Game, with the region's small states treated as pawns in the struggle for energy resources.⁷

7. Strobe Talbott, "A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia," address at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, July 21, 1997.

American interests also dictated that nuclear materials and biological and chemical weapons left over from the Soviet era not fall into the hands of terrorists or hostile states. In 1994 the U.S. provided assistance to Kazakhstan to shut down the Aktau fast-breeder reactor, and established a joint commission consisting of five working groups covering trade, defense, non-proliferation, and other forms of cooperation. Kazakhstan's Nazarbayev visited the U.S. in December 1999 to co-chair the sixth session of the joint commission and meet with Clinton, an indication of the central importance Washington accorded this Central Asian nation.

The U.S. also attached considerable importance to its relationship with Uzbekistan, in population the largest of the five Central Asian states. Uzbekistan was active in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and in 1999 the U.S. and Uzbekistan concluded agreements on military cooperation, anti-terrorism, and dismantling a chemical weapons research facility.⁸ While President Clinton himself did not visit Central Asia, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton traveled to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in November 1997, where she spoke on cultural diversity and women's rights. The close relationship established in the 1990s laid the foundation for U.S.-Uzbek cooperation in the war on terrorism following the September 11 attacks.

Key elements of U.S. policy toward the region were embodied in the Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, which supported the political and economic independence of the new states in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. This legislation prioritized resolving regional conflicts, developing trade and communications infrastructure, promoting human rights and democracy, and supporting U.S. business interests and investments in the region. Securing access to energy resources, containing terrorism, and preventing a reversion of the new states to communism were key goals on Capitol Hill, though few legislators evinced any real interest in the region.⁹

<<http://www.state.gov/www/regions/nis/970721talbott.html>>. Ambassador-at-Large to the newly independent states Stephen Sestanovich reiterated these goals in his March 1999 testimony to Congress, adding that while progress on some of the goals (democratic and economic reform, for example) was sporadic, the U.S. remained committed to continue its engagement with states in the region. Jim Nichol, "Central Asia's New States: Political Developments and Implications for U.S. Interests," Congressional Research Service Issue Brief for Congress, March 31, 2000, <<http://www.ncseonline.org/NLE/CRSreports/international/inter-26.cfm?&CFID=14226068&CFTOKEN=32552699>>.

8. Ibid.

9. GovTrack.us, <<http://www.govtrack.us/congress/billtext.xpd?bill=hr06-1152>>. Members of Congress who have consistently demonstrated interest in Central Asia include Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Representative Joe Pitts (R-PA).

The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan's (IMU) bombings in 1999,¹⁰ together with Chechen insurgency in Russia and Uighur discontent in China's Xinjiang region, heightened Washington's awareness of the security threats in Central Asia and contributed to the formal organization of the SCO in June 2001. Washington paid closer attention to regional terrorism following the IMU attacks; Secretary of State Madeleine Albright made her first visit to the region in April 2000, announcing a Central Asian Border Security Initiative and providing \$3 million in security assistance to each of the five Central Asian states. Subsequently, the State Department put the IMU on its list of recognized terrorist organizations. Human rights organizations charged that Washington was following a contradictory policy of supporting authoritarian leaders in the region based on security concerns and a need for oil, while glossing over serious human rights abuses, an accusation that would later be directed against the George W. Bush administration. However, there was still little if any official attention paid to the new SCO as an actor in regional politics.

CENTRAL ASIA: A MARGINAL CONCERN

The George W. Bush administration came into office critical of Clinton's foreign policy, and advocated a distinct, Republican set of foreign policy priorities. However, the focus before the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon was not on the possible threat of extreme Islamic-inspired terrorism, nor did the "arc of crisis" region, with Central Asia at its heart, command much attention. Policy before September 11 largely followed the parameters that had been established in the Clinton years. There was some concern about the signing of the Russian-Chinese Friendship Treaty, and joint Sino-Russian opposition to the U.S. administration's plans for missile defense and NATO expansion.¹¹ Although the

10. The IMU carried out a series of car bombings in Tashkent that killed 16 and wounded more than 100. Militants subsequently made incursions into regions of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, taking hostages and engaging in firefights with government forces. Matthew Stein, "The Goals of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Its Impact on Central Asia and the United States," Foreign Military Studies Office, Leavenworth, at <<http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/IMU-Goals.pdf>>, accessed April 26, 2013.

11. See Constantine C. Menges, "Russia, China, and What's Really on the Table," *Washington Post*, July 29, 2001, p. B02; Bruce A. Elleman and Sarah C. M. Paine, "Security Pact with Russia Bolsters China's Power," *International Herald Tribune*, August 6, 2001, p. 6.

George W. Bush administration had reportedly requested observer status at the formative SCO meeting, SCO members did not act on the request, and creation of the organization in June generated no official reaction from Washington.¹² Indeed, Russian President Vladimir Putin had his first encounter with Bush in Ljubljana the day after the Shanghai meeting, an encounter noteworthy for its warmth, if not substance.¹³

As a presidential candidate, George W. Bush had dismissed the notion that America could aid other countries in nation-building and asserted that the U.S. should behave with humility on the world stage. His chief foreign policy consultant and soon to be National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice outlined a security agenda for the new Republican administration—deterrence and power projection in defense of America’s interests, promoting free trade and economic growth, renewing ties with allies, developing comprehensive relationships with major powers such as Russia and China, and dealing decisively with the threats of rogue regimes and hostile powers that might develop weapons of mass destruction.¹⁴

In the Bush administration’s initial security assessment, Central Asia and Islamic extremism figured only marginally. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, who represented the neoconservative agenda, shaped much of the administration’s early thinking on international threats. Rumsfeld had chaired two major advisory panels in the 1990s, one of which warned against ballistic missile attack and proposed an expansive missile defense program, and the second of which predicted dire consequences that might result from a sneak attack against U.S. satellites in space. The most urgent threat stemmed from a small number of missiles in the hands of irresponsible rogue states, which could use them to intimidate the U.S. and others with weapons of mass destruction.¹⁵ Since Central Asia’s weapons of mass destruction had been

12. Menges (“Russia, China,” fn. 9) in effect complains about official Washington’s indifference to these developments. Andrew Higgins (“Bloc Including China, Russia Challenges U.S. in Central Asia, Members Agree to Combat Militant Islamic Groups and Share Intelligence,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2001) cites Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov as saying the U.S. had expressed interest in observer status at the SCO.

13. Patrick E. Tyler, “Bush and Putin Look Each Other in the Eye,” *New York Times*, June 17, 2001, p. 10.

14. Condoleezza Rice, “Promoting the National Interest,” *Foreign Affairs* 79 (January-February 2000), pp. 45–62.

15. Remarks by the president to students and faculty at the National Defense University, May 1, 2001, at <http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/pres/5101pres.pdf>, accessed November 22, 2010.

disposed of, and Bush's advisors discounted the benefits of nation-building, the region appeared to rank low on the administration's list of priorities.

PARTNERS AGAINST TERRORISM

With the terrorist attacks on the U.S. on September 11, 2001, the attention of the Bush administration shifted toward the al-Qaeda network and states providing support to terrorists, most notably, Afghanistan. Post-Soviet Central Asia suddenly became a vital staging ground in the war on terror.

Following the attacks, the Central Asian states each indicated its willingness to share intelligence and allow the U.S. overflight rights in the impending campaign against the Taliban. Rumsfeld visited Tashkent in early October 2001 and concluded an agreement to station some 1,500 American troops at the Karshi Khanabad (K2) Airbase, in exchange for security guarantees for Uzbekistan. In December, the U.S. and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement giving the U.S. access to the Manas airfield just outside the capital, Bishkek. The Kazakh government agreed to overflight of American planes and transshipment of supplies, and let the U.S. use the Almaty airport on an emergency basis. Tajikistan likewise granted the U.S. military use of the Dushanbe airport for refueling.¹⁶

The war on terror highlighted the shared interests of the U.S., Central Asia, Russia, and China, all of which faced threats to their national security from terrorist organizations influenced by radical Islam. Russia could more effectively claim that Chechen separatists were allied with Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. China quickly noted the connections between al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Uighur separatists in Xinjiang. The primary gain for Central Asia's leaders was to strengthen their hand against Muslim fundamentalists, who constituted the most serious opposition to their authoritarian regimes. The governments of these countries correctly understood that a U.S. preoccupied with fighting terrorists and willing to enact a fairly draconian U.S.A. Patriot Act, would be less critical of human rights abuses by its allies.

The U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) issued in September 2002 outlined a defense posture that pledged support for moderate and modern

16. See Elizabeth Wishnick, *Strategic Consequences of the Iraq War: U.S. Security Interests in Central Asia Reassessed* (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, May 2004), pp. 2–4.

governments in the Muslim world; promised more skilled diplomacy to win the “war of ideas”; and asserted U.S. goals of strengthening energy security by working with allies and partners to expand energy sources “especially in the Western Hemisphere, Africa, Central Asia, and the Caspian region.” With Russia, the U.S. sought to build a strategic partnership on common interests and shared challenges, while continuing to bolster the independence and stability of states of the former Soviet Union. Likewise, with China, the NSS described U.S. intent to seek a constructive relationship, cooperating in confronting terrorism while pressing Beijing to be more open and to respect human rights.¹⁷

During the first term of the Bush administration, policy toward the Central Asian region embodied contradictory elements linked to competing bureaucratic priorities. The Department of Defense under Donald Rumsfeld was focused on security concerns, primarily the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, while the State Department under Secretary Colin Powell emphasized democracy promotion over security interests. Despite the rhetoric on building democracy in Central Asia, funding for such projects declined during 2003–05. The Pentagon assumed a larger role in U.S. foreign policy making as the neoconservatives in the administration denigrated the role of diplomacy. The signal for authoritarian Central Asian regimes was that they would not be held to account for their repressive policies.¹⁸

Since, as detailed above, the SCO members cooperated with the U.S. in the Afghan campaign, Washington had few reasons to be concerned about the group. Some conservative analysts had voiced warnings about the SCO early on, but their concerns seemed to have little impact. Ariel Cohen of the Heritage Foundation portrayed the July 2001 Russian-Chinese friendship treaty as portending a major geopolitical transformation in Central Asia. Together with the formation of the SCO, this shift would position the two great powers to define the rules under which the U.S. and its allies would participate in the region.¹⁹ But even Congress, usually quick to discover

17. *The National Security Strategy of the U.S. of America*, September 2002, at <<http://georgewebush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/nss/2002/>>, accessed November 22, 2010.

18. Stephen Blank, “U.S. Interests in Central Asia and Their Challenges,” *Demokratizatsiya* [Democratization] 15:3 (Summer 2007), pp. 321–22.

19. Ariel Cohen, “The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty: A Strategic Shift in Eurasia?” Backgrounder #1459, July 18, 2001, at <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2001/07/the-russia-china-friendship-and-cooperation-treaty>>, accessed November 17, 2010.

threats to U.S. security interests real or imagined, made few if any inquiries into the group's functioning.²⁰ More alarmist were remarks published by Christopher Brown of the Hudson Institute, who described the SCO as "perhaps the most dangerous organization that the American people have never heard of."²¹ This argument was later picked up by Congressional critics, including then-Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas, who held hearings on the SCO in September 2006.²² By this point, U.S. policy and attitudes had shifted from indifference to hostility, although Washington still needed Central Asian assistance in the war on terror.

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AS THREAT

The U.S. had no problem with the original purpose of the SCO—to resolve border disputes, enhance security along the borders, and cooperate against terrorism and narcotics smuggling. But Washington did oppose the extension of the organization's brief to include opposition to foreign bases and uncritical protection of authoritarian regimes. The Bush administration was wary of the SCO's relationship with Iran (which became an observer state in 2005), and suspected the two larger states (Russia and China) of pressuring the smaller members to support their opposition to the U.S. unilateral order.

The SCO states emphasized the importance of preserving sovereignty, in an era when U.S. unilateralism had demonstrated a tendency to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries, most blatantly with the bombing of Serbia in 1999. Serbia was followed by the Georgian, Ukrainian, and Kyrgyz "color revolutions" and the May 2005 uprising in Andijon, Uzbekistan, all of which the SCO members viewed as inspired and supported by the U.S. Moreover, these democratic movements occurred in parallel with the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. This series of events, in

20. A hearing by the Middle East and Central Asian Subcommittee of the House International Relations Committee in October 2003, for example, covered various aspects of terrorism, religious extremism, and regional stability in Central Asia without once mentioning the SCO. "Central Asia: Terrorism, Religious Extremism, and Regional Stability," Hearing before the Subcommittee on the Middle East and Central Asia, House International Relations Committee, October 29, 2003 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2004).

21. Chris Brown, "Putin's Power Pact with China," *Frontpagemag.com*, May 30, 2005, at <<http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=8449>>, accessed November 17, 2010.

22. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is It Undermining U.S. Interests in Central Asia?" Hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, September 26, 2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2008), p. 9.

combination with the Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive attack outlined in the 2002 NSS, convinced the SCO members that the U.S. was prepared routinely to violate other nations' sovereignty in its war against terrorism.

The Bush administration had requested sending observers to the SCO, but had been repeatedly turned down, making Washington more suspicious of the organization. The fact that Iran was admitted as an observer in 2005 (together with Pakistan and India; Mongolia had achieved observer status in 2004) strengthened the perception that the SCO was evolving into an anti-Western alliance.²³ It was also in 2005 that the SCO summit called for a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Central Asia. Meeting in Astana in July, the SCO members noted that although they supported the coalition campaign, the active military phase of anti-terror operations in Afghanistan was nearing completion, and therefore a withdrawal date should be set for troops stationed in SCO member states.²⁴

The SCO's call for the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan and the bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, together with Uzbek President Islam Karimov's request that America evacuate the K-2 base within six months, raised alarm bells in Washington. President Karimov was put off by U.S. criticism over the bloody suppression of demonstrators in the city of Andijon in May 2005 and Western demands for an independent international investigation of the events. U.S. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns had been scheduled to meet with Karimov on August 2 in Tashkent, but Uzbekistan cancelled the meeting after the U.S. airlifted Uzbek refugees

23. Mark N. Katz, "Policy Watch: Eyeing the Shanghai Group," *UPI.com*, July 2, 2007, at <<http://digilib.gmu.edu:8080/jspui/bitstream/1920/5947/1/EyeingtheShanghaiGroup.pdf>>, accessed November 1, 2010.

24. *Declaration of Heads of Member States of SCO*, Astana, July 5, 2005, at <http://english.sco-summit2006.org/en_bjzl/2006-04/21/content_145.htm>, accessed November 17, 2010. The relevant section of the Declaration reads: "We are supporting and shall continue to support the efforts by the international coalition, conducting antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan. Today we are noticing the positive dynamics of stabilising internal political situation in Afghanistan. A number of the SCO member states provided their ground infrastructure for temporary stationing of military contingents of some states, members of the coalition, as well as their territory and air space for military transit in the interest of the antiterrorist operation. Considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation consider it necessary, that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states."

out of the region, and Karimov subsequently gave the U.S. six months to vacate K-2.²⁵

Washington's support for the color revolutions in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005) convinced the SCO's authoritarian leaders that the U.S. was seeking to impose its model of governance in the former Soviet space. The expansion of NATO eastward, and NATO's links with the Central Asian states through the Partnership for Peace arrangements, were highly troubling to Moscow and Beijing. All members of the SCO feared the Bush administration "freedom agenda" of promoting regime change in authoritarian states.

The U.S. government preferred a bilateral approach toward the SCO member states, with the objective of countering Russian and Chinese influence over the smaller Central Asian countries. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, on a trip to Bishkek in July 2005, asserted that the status of the Central Asian bases was a matter for bilateral negotiations with the host countries, and not a concern of the SCO.²⁶ The U.S. and Kyrgyzstan engaged in protracted negotiations about the status of the base over the next several months. Secretary of State Rice finalized an agreement in October, and Kyrgyzstan's new president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, asserted that any future decision on the withdrawal of American forces would be a matter of negotiations between the two countries.²⁷ Washington subsequently agreed to a substantial increase in the rent it was paying for Manas. The SCO's declaration did not succeed in closing the base, but it did give Bishkek additional leverage to extract greater financial support from the U.S.

Congress quickly inserted itself into the equation. In July 2005, the House of Representatives passed an amendment to the Foreign Relations Authorization Act expressing concern about the SCO's declaration on withdrawal of foreign forces. It called on the president and the secretaries of State and Defense to open a dialogue with the SCO countries regarding bases in the region.²⁸ In September 2006, the Congressional Commission on Security and

25. Jim Hoagland, "Ousted from Uzbekistan: Our Global Strategy Trips over Cold War Reflexes," *Washington Post*, August 7, 2005, p. B07.

26. Eric Schmitt, "Rumsfeld Stop in Kyrgyzstan Aims to Keep Access to Base," *New York Times*, July 26, 2005, p. 8.

27. Robin Wright, "Kyrgyzstan Agrees to Continuing U.S. Military Presence at Key Air Base," *Washington Post*, October 12, 2005, p. A10.

28. Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007, Sec. 1413, at <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d109:HRO2601:@@D&summ2=m&>>, accessed November 12, 2010.

Cooperation in Europe organized hearings to determine if the SCO was undermining American interests in Central Asia. The Commission's chairman, Senator Sam Brownback, noted that the member states of the SCO had demonstrated a commitment to assisting the U.S. in the war on terror, but voiced his concerns about the SCO impeding democratization in Central Asia and the suspicion that an underlying goal was to weaken American influence in the region. Senator Brownback noted that all the Central Asian states were also members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and had signed on to its democratic and human rights commitments. By contrast, the SCO's principle of absolute sovereignty and non-interference in domestic affairs appeared to contravene OSCE provisions.²⁹ In the 2006 Silk Road Strategy Act, Congress urged "the continuation and expansion of a strategic dialogue with Russia and China, including U.S. participation as an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) for the purpose of promoting stability and security in the region."³⁰

From the Bush administration's perspective, the SCO facilitated Chinese and Russian influence in Central Asian regional affairs, readily sanctioned flawed elections, and conferred legitimacy on these authoritarian governments. In other words, the SCO insulated officials from external criticism and objective scrutiny, thus maintaining fragile and potentially unsustainable regimes. Washington's position was that real stability could only be achieved through democratic change; Russia, China, and the Central Asians, by contrast, trusted more in authoritarian stability. China's search for oil and raw materials led Beijing to uncritically support undemocratic and repressive regimes in Central Asia. Washington did not view the SCO as a helpful regional organization, preferring instead to work with individual countries, NATO, the OSCE, the EU, or Japan. Nor did the U.S. see Iranian participation in the SCO as productive.³¹

To the extent that it was perceived as a potential counterbalance to NATO and the OSCE in Central Asia, the SCO was a problem for Washington. Russian-Chinese/SCO military exercises conducted in 2005 (off the Chinese

29. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is It Undermining U.S. Interests in Central Asia?" pp. 1-3.

30. S.2749—Silk Road Strategy Act of 2006, May 4, 2006, at <<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:s2749>>, accessed November 4, 2010.

31. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is It Undermining U.S. Interests in Central Asia?" pp. 3-10.

coast) and 2007 (in Xinjiang and Siberia) raised the possibility that the SCO might evolve into a military organization, despite Chinese assertions to the contrary. Moscow has promoted the idea of the SCO becoming a military and security organization, but Beijing has preferred to develop the SCO's potential in trade and economic cooperation. Given China's dominant influence in the SCO, Moscow gravitates more toward the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a potential security competitor to NATO. Although all SCO members are (with the exception of China) also members of the OSCE, the SCO member states have been critical of OSCE electoral monitoring through the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which has generally criticized electoral processes in the region as flawed.³²

Energy and security issues are closely intertwined in Central Asia, and while U.S. interests largely coincide with those of the SCO members on security, the relationship is far more competitive when it comes to energy. Both the Clinton and Bush administrations stressed the importance for the U.S. of developing multiple pipeline routes in Central Asia, to avoid Russia's monopoly over exports. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) are prominent examples of Washington's diversification strategy for energy export routes in Central Asia. Support for U.S. oil and gas firms operating in the Caspian region has been an openly stated goal of U.S. foreign policy throughout the Clinton, Bush, and Obama administrations.³³

In its second term, the Bush administration signaled a new comprehensive approach toward Central Asia. At Secretary of State Rice's initiative, the State Department created a Bureau of South and Central Asian affairs (SCA), thereby pulling the Central Asian states out of the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. By separating former Soviet Central Asia from Europe and grouping it with Afghanistan and the South Asian countries of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, the administration said it hoped to create new opportunities for trade and commerce. Linking Afghanistan to the broader region through a network of economic ties and transportation networks was

32. For a review of OSCE activities in Central Asia, see Maria Raquel Freire, "The OSCE in the New Central Asia," in Emilian Kovalski, ed., *The New Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2010), pp. 49–70.

33. See the testimony to the House International Relations Subcommittee by Ambassador Steven Mann, principal deputy assistant secretary for the State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs: "Assessing Energy and Security Issues in Central Asia," Hearing before the Committee on International Relations, House of Representatives, July 25, 2006 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2006), pp. 1–5.

preferable to preserving its traditional role as a buffer between empires, the fate to which it was consigned during the 19th century Great Game.³⁴ Reflecting this perspective, the 2006 NSS (1) advocated restoring Afghanistan's "historic role" as a land bridge between South and Central Asia (a region of "great strategic importance"), (2) referred to Central Asia (the five post-Soviet states) as an enduring priority in American security, and (3) stressed the progress that had been achieved with India (though not at the expense of relations with Pakistan).³⁵

Toward the end of the Bush administration, it became clear that the SCO's 2005 call for a rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces in Central Asia was not being followed up.³⁶ The deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan and the potential for greater instability should U.S. troops withdraw was probably one contributing factor. China has sought to retain its dominant position within the SCO, and appreciates the organization's potential to constrain U.S. influence in the region. Chinese leaders use the SCO as a forum to signal their international positions, as they did in welcoming Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the 2012 Beijing summit, and in condemning Washington's unilateral actions against Syria and Iran. Yet, the Chinese leaders remain wary of transforming the SCO into an anti-Western body.³⁷ The two larger members—Russia and China—have frequently been at odds over expanding SCO membership and the organization's primary functions, and these differences have been sufficient to prevent the SCO from evolving into either an integrated economic group or a military organization

34. The idea of a greater Central Asia was developed by S. Frederick Starr, and is elaborated in his "A Partnership for Central Asia," *Foreign Affairs* 84:2 (July/August 2005), pp. 164–78.

35. *The National Security Strategy of the U.S. of America*, March 2006, pp. 39–40.

36. See the remarks by Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A. Boucher, "Central Asia: An Overview," Hearing before the Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment, House International Affairs Committee, April 8, 2008 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 2008), p. 15.

37. President Ahmadinejad was invited to the 2012 SCO Beijing summit, but while Chinese President Hu Jintao encouraged a peaceful dialogue process between Iran and the West to address the nuclear issue, Iran was not offered full membership in the organization. Official Website of SCO Summit 2012, at <<http://www.scosummit2012.org/english/>>, accessed April 26, 2013. For more detailed discussions of China, Iran, and the SCO, see Alexander A. Pikayev, "Enlarging the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Is Iran a Viable Member?" PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, no. 15, August 2008, at <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_015.pdf>, accessed April 26, 2013; and Marybeth Davis et al., *China-Iran: A Limited Partnership*, United States-China Economic and Security Review Commission, October 2012, at <http://military.dyndns.info/Docs/China-Iran_A_limited_partnership,_October_2012.pdf>, accessed April 26, 2013.

capable of challenging NATO.³⁸ In turn, the smaller Central Asian states regularly play off the great powers against each other, and have been reluctant to weaken ties with the U.S.³⁹ By the final years of the Bush administration, the specter of the SCO evolving into a powerful multilateral institution opposed to U.S. interests in Central Asia had essentially been laid to rest.

LIMITED ENGAGEMENT

When Barack Obama assumed the presidency in 2009, the U.S. was overstretched by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and was facing a debilitating economic recession at home. The new president's initial approach in foreign policy was in many ways a reaction against the Bush policy of unilateralism, democracy promotion, and excessive reliance on force; it was what one observer called a "grand redefinition" of U.S. foreign policy.⁴⁰ President Obama assumed office on a foreign policy platform oriented toward pragmatic, constructive engagement, with an emphasis on diplomacy over the use of force and the promise of working through multilateral institutions in place of unilateralism.⁴¹ Far less ideological than his predecessor, Obama's strategy of reaching out to such potential adversaries as Russia, China, and Iran aligned nicely with Charles Kupchan's argument that engagement is more productive than confrontation in resolving longstanding rivalries.⁴² Engaging authoritarian states such as those in Central Asia enhanced U.S. security interests, but seemingly at the expense of democracy promotion efforts.

38. As former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Evan Feigenbaum noted, the SCO is problematic for Washington to deal with as an organization, since the SCO members themselves do not have a clear concept of whether they want the SCO to be a security group, trade bloc, or a mutually supportive association of authoritarian states. "The SCO Role in Afghanistan," interview with Evan A. Feigenbaum, Council on Foreign Relations, March 26, 2009, at <http://www.cfr.org/publication/18944/sco_role_in_afghanistan.html>, accessed November 16, 2010.

39. For example, although U.S. forces had left Uzbekistan, German forces remained at Termez, in exchange for generous compensation. Kyrgyzstan permitted the U.S. to continue to use Manas following negotiations that dramatically raised compensation for use of the base.

40. Zbigniew Brzezinski, "From Hope to Audacity: Appraising Obama's Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* 89:1 (January/February 2010), pp. 16–30.

41. Obama's foreign policy leans more toward a liberal institutionalist perspective than toward realism. For a critical assessment, see Henry R. Nau, "Obama's Foreign Policy," *Policy Review*, Issue 160 (April & May 2010), pp. 27–47.

42. Charles A. Kupchan, "Enemies into Friends: How the U.S. Can Court Its Adversaries," *Foreign Affairs* 89:2 (March/April 2010), pp. 120–34. For a fuller discussion, see Kupchan's *How Enemies Become Friends: The Sources of Stable Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Engaging Central Asia, Russia, and China has been vitally important to the Obama administration's strategy in Afghanistan. This policy involves continuing the "greater Central Asia" concept adopted on Rice's watch and encouraging a constructive role for Moscow and Beijing in the region. Russia and the Central Asian states proved critical to delivering supplies to the troops in Afghanistan via the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), the commercially based alternate route for transporting non-lethal supplies from the Baltic ports through Russia and Central Asia to Afghanistan, as the links through Pakistan became problematic.⁴³ Beijing was approached about providing additional supply routes but remained wary of cooperating with Washington. Bilateral American ties with all five Central Asian states were formalized in December 2009 with the creation of the Annual Bilateral Consultations process, and Washington expressed interest in participating actively in such organizations as the SCO.⁴⁴

The Obama administration followed through on its pledge to engage regional organizations by sending Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Patrick Moon to a March 2009 SCO conference on Afghanistan in Moscow. This was the first time that senior officials from the U.S. and NATO had been invited to an SCO meeting (NATO Deputy Secretary-General Martin Howard was also present, along with representatives from a number of other major organizations, including the U.N.). Moon praised the joint action plan adopted by the SCO and Afghanistan at the conference as a positive step, discussed the narcotics problem there, and said the U.S. was looking to contribute to SCO efforts to stabilize the situation. Moon's presence was also intended to signal the new administration's willingness to extend an open hand to Iran, since the Iranians were in attendance as observers.⁴⁵

To be successful, the Obama administration's Central Asia policy required improving relations with and engaging the two larger members of the SCO,

43. Non-lethal equipment refers to items not directly used for combat. This includes building supplies, clothing, communications gear, fuel, food, and so forth.

44. Robert O. Blake, Jr., "Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Committee," Subcommittee on Europe and Eurasia, March 10, 2011, at <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2011/158199.htm>>, accessed June 10, 2011; and Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks on Regional Architecture in Asia: Principles and Priorities," East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, January 12, 2010, at <<http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2010/01/135090.htm>>, accessed November 2010.

45. Vladimir Radyuhin, "SCO: Towards a High-Profile Role in Afghanistan," *The Hindu*, March 31, 2009, at <<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2009/03/31/stories/2009033152430800.htm>>, accessed November 16, 2010.

Russia and China. These two great powers, and to a lesser extent the Central Asian members, were needed to help the U.S. contain Iran's nuclear ambitions and stabilize Afghanistan. Given persistent attacks on supply convoys traversing the Pakistani routes, Russia and the Central Asian states became key components of the NDN. The NDN is considered vital in provisioning the additional troops deployed by the Obama administration's surge in Afghanistan. Former Defense Secretary Robert Gates described the NDN as "enormously helpful" to the effort in Afghanistan, noting that as of September 2010 the alliance had sent some 20,000 containers through the network.⁴⁶ By early 2013 the great bulk of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) supplies continued to transit the more expensive northern route, even after Pakistan reopened the supply lines from the south.⁴⁷

This policy of engagement initially worked well in the "reset" effort with Russia under President Dmitri Medvedev, but relations have soured since Putin returned to the presidency; ties with China are complicated as well. By the second half of 2010, the Obama administration's "open hand" initiative to utilize the soft power of diplomacy in preference to the hard power of military force was being reevaluated, and a harder U.S. line could be detected toward rival states. This included China, which was deliberately snubbed by President Obama during his November 2010 Asia tour. Beijing had been less than accommodating on a range of issues, including currency valuation, treatment of Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo, the South China Sea territorial dispute, and U.S. requests to transport troops and supplies for the Afghan campaign through the Wakhan Corridor. The Afghan government has urged China to open the border along the corridor and to build a road or rail line, but Beijing authorities have declined to act.⁴⁸

While presenting its foreign policy as something radically different, the Obama administration has in essence continued and intensified the late Bush-era policy of a comprehensive approach to Central Asia, with the goal of engaging the surrounding powers to develop the trade, energy, and

46. Peter Cheremushkin (Interfax) interview with Secretary Robert Gates, September 13, 2010, at <<http://www.defense.gov/transcripts/transcript.aspx?transcriptid=4687>>, accessed November 2, 2010.

47. Phil Stewart and David Alexander, "Pakistan Supply Routes Open, but Move Gear Slowly into Afghanistan," Reuters, March 8, 2013, at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/08/us-pakistan-usa-afghanistan-idUSBRE9271CF20130308>>, accessed March 20, 2013.

48. Edward Wong, "In Icy Tip of Afghanistan, War Seems as Remote as Tropics," *New York Times*, October 28, 2010, p. 1.

transportation infrastructure of the region. In addition to providing vital transportation networks, the Central Asian states coordinate with Washington on anti-narcotics efforts, supply electricity to Afghanistan, and even (in the case of Kazakhstan) provide scholarships to Afghan students.⁴⁹ This broad and inclusive approach is deemed necessary to stabilize Afghanistan and to integrate that country into a new regional order following the planned ISAF withdrawal in 2014. However, Washington has utilized bilateral strategies with the relevant countries, rather than engaging the SCO as an organization. This is not so much an effort to undercut the SCO as it is an acknowledgment that the SCO as an organization has to date proved largely ineffective, and is hobbled internally by Sino-Russian competition.

Although China does not participate in the NDN, Washington had hoped to secure Beijing's cooperation in the form of additional supply routes, largely by rail.⁵⁰ The Obama administration has continued its predecessor's efforts to make China a "responsible stakeholder" in global affairs, and one key aspect of this is cooperation in stabilizing Afghanistan and greater Central Asia. China's interests in trade and developing Afghanistan's huge mineral resource base could be leveraged to realize the Obama administration's goal of reconstructing and developing Afghanistan. In addition, China has historically maintained close relations with Pakistan, which is indispensable in dealing with Afghanistan. Furthermore, the U.S. and China agree on the need to counter terrorism and narcotics trafficking in Central Asia. Yet, China appears more than willing to let the U.S and NATO shoulder the regional security burden, while anticipating long-term benefits from trade and investment in Afghanistan.

The SCO's inability, or unwillingness, to assume an active role in addressing the violent events of June 2010 in Kyrgyzstan, or those of July 2012 in the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan, highlighted the organization's limitations.⁵¹ The Tashkent summit in 2010 coincided with the riots

49. Blake, Jr., "Testimony."

50. The author participated in a July 2010 joint U.S. Pacific Command/Central Command conference on engaging China in Afghanistan: "A Discussion of PRC Strategy Towards Central Asia, Focusing on Afghanistan, and the Role of Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," July 15–16, 2010, Chantilly, Virginia. Also, see Robert O. Blake, Jr., Press Conference, Beijing, March 18, 2011, at <<http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rmks/2011/158583.htm>>, accessed June 10, 2011.

51. In June 2010 following the ouster of Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, riots in the south of the country between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks left more than 400 dead. Acting President Roza Otunbayeva appealed to Moscow to help quell the violence, but Moscow declined to intervene.

in southern Kyrgyzstan, yet the members did no more than reaffirm the principles of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity; urge the speedy stabilization of the political situation; and express a willingness to provide Bishkek with the “necessary support and assistance in solving this problem.”⁵² The SCO did send representatives to monitor the referendum for a new Kyrgyz constitution, along with the OSCE and Russian Central Elections Commission.⁵³ Given the timing of the riots, there was a strong suspicion that criminal forces had sparked the violence for their own purposes, and this may have played a role in the caution exhibited by the SCO.⁵⁴

The SCO’s ineffectiveness and its internal rivalries have not been lost on Washington, which now largely ignores the organization. Still, the SCO has appeal for countries wary of U.S. unilateralism and suspicious of Western norms regarding humanitarian intervention. Although the organization has been described as a club of authoritarians, even democracies like India and Mongolia appreciate the “Shanghai spirit” of respect for territorial integrity, observing the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs, and respect for state sovereignty. This perspective may explain Turkey’s successful bid for SCO dialogue partner status (approved at the 2012 Beijing SCO summit), and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s subsequent remarks that his country might drop its bid for EU membership in favor of joining the SCO.⁵⁵

The violence in the remote province of Gorna-Badakhshan between government forces and local warlords, which resulted in more than 40 deaths, appears to have involved both issues of political control and drug profits. See International Crisis Group, “The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan,” *Asia Report*, no. 193, August 23, 2010, at <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/central-asia/kyrgyzstan/193%20The%20Pogroms%20in%20Kyrgyzstan.pdf>>, accessed April 26, 2013; and “Violence in Tajikistan: The Strongman Cometh,” *Economist*, July 28, 2012, at <<http://www.economist.com/node/21559664>>, accessed April 26, 2013.

52. “Tashkent Declaration of SCO Heads of State Council Meeting,” at the SCO website, <<http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/show.asp?id=224>>, accessed November 19, 2010.

53. *Ibid.*, <<http://www.sectSCO.org/EN/Yolder.asp>>, accessed November 19, 2010.

54. Sergey Borisov, “Medvedev Warns Extremists May Take Advantage of Kyrgyzstan’s New Government,” *RT*, at <<http://rt.com/politics/medvedev-kyrgyzstan-parliamentary-republic/>>, accessed November 19, 2010.

55. Emre Tunç Sakaoglu, “Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the West and Turkey,” *Turkish Weekly*, March 13, 2013, at <<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/148066/shanghai-cooperation-organization-the-west-and-turkey.html>>, accessed March 20, 2013; and Yigal Schleifer, “Turkey: With EU Talks Stalled, Erdogan Suggests Ankara May Join SCO,” *Eurasianet*, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66460>>, accessed March 20, 2013.

CONCLUSION

While the SCO members remain wary of America's presence in greater Central Asia, the prospect of a U.S. withdrawal may be equally troubling. Neither Russia nor China appears willing to assume the costs of policing the region, nor does the SCO have the capability or will to exercise its professed functions of guaranteeing security and preventing terrorism. The recent uptick in terrorist incidents within the Central Asian states and continued Taliban strikes in Afghanistan reinforce the conviction that the American project in Afghanistan is a failure. Uprisings similar to those in the Middle East are entirely possible, and may provide entrée for extremist elements linked to the IMU and al-Qaeda. Repeated Uighur-Han clashes in China's Xinjiang Province—in 1990, 2009, and, most recently, April 2013—ensure Beijing's continuing interest in securitizing the region.⁵⁶ In this context, an invigorated SCO may serve the interests of all major actors, including Washington, though with human rights and democracy likely to be sacrificed on the altar of security.

American foreign policy toward Central Asia and the SCO has fluctuated from indifference to hostility to cooperation and limited engagement, depending on the international context and the vagaries of U.S. domestic politics. The Obama administration came into office prepared to cooperate with multilateral organizations like it, and extended an open hand to the large and medium powers of the region. While Russia and the Central Asian states have been generally supportive of a temporary American presence in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region, as demonstrated by their cooperation on the NDN, China has been less accommodative. Beijing has refused to become militarily involved in Afghanistan and does not allow Washington to use its territory for transporting materiel. From China's perspective, an active role for the SCO in Afghanistan is preferable to NATO and U.S. involvement.⁵⁷ By 2010 the Obama administration realized that engagement

56. On the 1990 and 2009 Uighur-Han clashes and China's security policies in Central Asia, see Michael E. Clarke, *Xinjiang and China's Rise in Central Asia—A History* (London: Routledge, 2011). On the 2013 events, see Kathrin Hille, "China Says 21 Killed in Xinjiang Clashes," *Financial Times*, April 24, 2013, at <<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/8487a202-acaf-11e2-9454-00144feabdco.html#axzzRb8rqj3j>>, accessed April 26, 2013.

57. Zhao Huasheng, *China and Afghanistan: China's Interests, Stances, and Perspectives* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 2012).

with the SCO had its limits, and reverted to a bilateral approach to the region similar to that pursued by the previous administration.

The Obama White House has faced a dilemma in Central Asia similar to that of the George W. Bush administration. The U.S. needs to strike a balance among its efforts at democracy promotion, its energy and economic interests, and its security objectives in the region, but has had great difficulty doing so. None of the SCO members has an exemplary record on human rights, but each has a vital role to play in stabilizing Afghanistan, and all share Washington's goals of promoting economic development and containing terrorism, extremism, and narcotics trafficking. The concept of Greater Central Asia rightly stresses the interconnected nature of the region in terms of transportation, energy, electricity, and water, as well as terrorism, and so a policy of engagement and cooperation makes strategic sense. Washington's policy toward this remote but critical region has evolved, and its diplomatic and military bureaucracies have become more sophisticated in their approach. And yet the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an institution remains marginal to Washington's calculations.